



THE  
FINAL DRAFT  
VOLUME XVI, 2013

A Collection of Creative Works from the Students and Faculty at  
Durham Technical Community College





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2015



# **The Final Draft**

---

**LITERARY JOURNAL**  
**VOLUME 16, SPRING 2013**

**Managing Editor/Poetry Editor**  
Alexandra Rae Cox

**Prose Editor**  
Timothy Smithers

**Art Editor**  
Benjamin Pepe

**Layout/Design Editor**  
Sarah Joelle Holstein

**Associate Editors**  
Michelle Blackwood  
Nicholas Oberle  
Christian Gunn  
Bernard Liles  
Sara M. Laudeman  
Cameron Aviles  
Ali Lynn  
Eeyi Oon  
Sabrina Bowyer  
Cynelsa EB  
Quaniex Sabir  
Bill Sellars  
Tyler Turner  
Gray Ludlum

**Advisors**  
Stephanie Whetstone  
Jonathan Cook

Copyright © 2013  
*The Final Draft Literary Journal*  
Durham, North Carolina



The opinions expressed on the pages of *The Final Draft* are understood to reflect the views of their creators only.

All material is Copyright © 2013 The Final Draft Literary Journal.

Unauthorized use is a violation of applicable copyright laws. Copyright reverts to contributor upon publication.

*The Final Draft Literary Journal* is an annual publication.

***The Final Draft Literary Journal* gratefully acknowledges the support of the Durham Technical Community College Student Senate**

Cover art by Sarah Joelle Holstein

Back cover art by Erin Souther

**Special Thanks to:**

Joseph Bathanti, Lea Bingham, Kerry Cantwell, Brenda Cleary, Perry Cumbie, Marina DelVecchio, Theresa Fine-Pawsey, Dr. Thomas Gould, Emily Hamrick, Tom Jaynes, Dr. David Long, Janel Mays, Tracy Mancini, Sally Parlier, Gilbert Umberger, the DTCC Librarians, and the DTCC Student Senate



# Table of Contents

Introduction 7

## SHORT FICTION

**My Fable/ Mi Fábula** 17

*Dorothy Harrington*

**My Time to Shine: My Life as the Sun** 18

*Crishauna McLaughlin*

**Sound in the Silence** 21

*Sara M. Lauderman*

**The Girl of His Dreams** 29

*Elijah Moore*

**She Moves** 32

*Bernard Liles*

**Don't Go Out In November** 45

*Darin Reinert*

**Left/Right Game** 59

*Crishauna McLaughlin*

**Death is Born** 61

*Bernard Liles*

**The Great Grocery Hunt** 66

*Tyler Turner*

**Rose and Raven** 80

*Eeyi Oon*

**The Transformation** 98

*Jennifer Romine*

**True Contact** 101

*Sarah Joelle Holstein*



## ESSAYS

**The Diceman Cometh: A  
Beginner's Guide to the Art of Aleatoric Art** 93  
*Sir Francis Dashwood*

**Why I Believe in Notecards** 75  
*Nyree Charles*

## POETRY

**Life Through Poetry** 9  
*Sadek Alzubaidi*

**Self Taught** 10  
*Jane Shlensky*

**Mollycoddled Young** 12  
*Iniyatt Jennah Nu'Man*

**Carrying a Reel-to-Reel Tape  
Recorder Through the City Centre** 13  
*Sir Francis Dashwood*

**People** 15  
*Debbie Mayes*

**What Happens to a Dream Deferred** 16  
*Wesley Smith*

**Road Noise** 16  
*AJIC*

**Autumn Lawn at Walden** 18  
*Jane Shlensky*

**Tree Poetry** 20  
*Joy King*

**Autumn's Fire Wood** 21  
*Zahra Parnianpour*

**I Never Got to Be** 27  
*Michelle Blackwood*

**Where is the Sweetness** 28  
*Debbie Mayes*

**Dear Wall** 28  
*Crishauna McLaughlin*



- Inept** 29  
*Marquise Kingsbury*
- Forever I Will Wait** 30  
*Kyle Reece*
- Dear World** 31  
*Donald L Hawkins II*
- Part Three** 33  
*Zahra Parnianpour*
- We Knew It Was Coming** 34  
*AJIC*
- But Where Is Rock Bottom?** 35  
*Tiffany Eller*
- Is It Wrong** 35  
*Kyle Reece*
- My Time With Christian** 38  
*Sabrina Bowyer*
- Falling** 40  
*Sara M. Laudeman*
- Ah'lam** 41  
*Hafsa Mohamud*
- Victim** 42  
*Elizabeth Price*
- Country Music** 44  
*Jane Shlensky*
- Back Then** 52  
*Marquise Kingsbury*
- The Courts of Geneva** 53  
*Iniyatt Jennah Nu'Man*
- Closer to God Through Self-Denial** 56  
*Crishauna McLaughlin*
- I Miss My Kitty Kitty** 57  
*Sabrina Bowyer*
- The Caged Bird** 58  
*Kyle Reece*



**Out of Time** 60  
*Marquise Kingsbury*

**Uncertainty** 66  
*Alexandra Rae Cox*

**For the Dreamer** 73  
*Doris J. Finch*

**When It All Tumbles Down** 75  
*Kyle Reece*

**By Ear** 77  
*Jane Shlensky*

**El Paso Básico** 78  
*Lance Lee*

**The Intimate Me** 79  
*Cynthia B. Davis*

**Just a Bottle** 79  
*Zahra Parnianpour*

**Soaker** 90  
*Jane Shlensky*

**Peace, Life, and Freedom** 91  
*Bernard Liles*

**Color Me Blind** 97  
*Michelle Blackwood*

**Practice** 98  
*Jane Shlensky*

**Laughter** 100  
*Alexandra Rae Cox*

**The Keeper of Dreams** 111  
*Michelle Blackwood*



# Introduction

When I tell people what the Final Draft is (because people always ask), I say, “It’s a book we publish featuring a compilation of stories, poems and art by students, faculty and staff here at Durham Tech.” But it’s so much more than that, it’s so much more than a brief conversation in a hallway can describe. Yes, we do publish such a book, but the Final Draft is first and foremost a club whose purpose is to cultivate, encourage and inspire creativity at Durham Tech.

Writing and drawing are incredibly difficult and personal endeavors. By writing a poem or drawing a picture, you’re showing who you are at your core, you’re leaving yourself exposed. It can be terrifying, and that fear is often the cause of why people choose not to write. We often hear stories about people who want to write or draw, but they don’t because they are self-conscious or simply don’t know where to start. As a club, we’re here to help people at Durham Tech overcome that fear, and we give them a place to start so they can become better artists and writers.

I’ve never been to a school that had such a diverse population. There are single parents, working students, students who have returned to get a degree after several years out of school, and then there are students who are still in high school. There are people from all over the world here, and in every class you go into I guarantee you will see a various group of races and cultures present. Durham Tech has an eclectic, diverse spirit, and I believe this book we’ve published captures that spirit perfectly. Within these pages are stories, poems, essays and artwork from people of different cultures and backgrounds. The work you find here may make you cry, laugh or give you chills of fright. Some pieces may also reawaken your sense of wonder. The compilation as a whole, I hope, will make you see with a fresh pair of eyes, even if just for a moment.

Thank you for your support, and we hope you enjoy this book.

— *Alexandra Rae Cox*

*The Final Draft Managing Editor and Poetry Editor*





Art by BENJAMIN PEPE



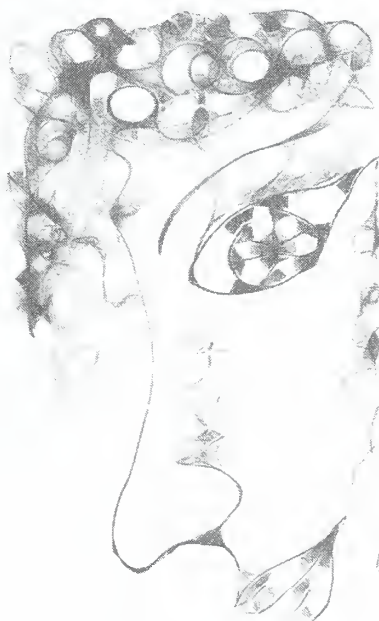
# Life Through Poetry

SADEK ALZUBAIDI

As I am sitting, laid back, watching television with the screen cracked,  
I recollect on scattered dreams of moving out of this detrimental shack  
I hope I can put myself together before I snap, before I fall apart  
I hope I foresee the place of my destination unwrap before I start  
I hope the world is ready for a person who's not ready for the world  
With wishes that are steady, dreams put together with hopes of pearls

All I have is my pen, my pad, and my unorthodox poetry  
I live in these poems; this world is far too ordinate for me  
I bathe in these lines, travel in these stanzas, and eat from these rhymes  
I find closure in these scribbles, I argue and agree with myself at times  
I'm in debt to this paper, these blue lines demand more as they look me in the eyes  
If I set it off for later, once blue, these lines grow old, grey, and age before their time

I am free in these verses; I come to life with every word I submit  
If I commit literary crimes, my mistakes are forgiven, allowed to omit  
Life brought me down to the ground, on my knees, so I prayed for it  
I wrote a poem for it, named it death, so that it may be inevitable for it  
Whether or not the world listens to it, I will never quit or blink an open eye for it  
Even if my tongue is cut off for it, these thoughts will forever be primed for it



Art by TONYA WALLER



# Self Taught

JANE SHLENSKY

“Deep and wide, deep and wide, there’s a fountain flowing deep and wide...”

We know it is a church song;  
we are in Bible School, singing,  
wondering where this fountain is,  
wanting to have a look at the way  
it’s built, if it is spring-fed or town water.

Our school fountains are tall and metallic  
with a foot peddle at the bottom, a hand knob  
at the top, a shiny shallow basin  
beneath the spout with a drain for overflow,  
a little step placed nearby for small children.

At school, we wait to use the fountains,  
wondering if the person in front of us  
mouths the spout or lets the cold arc  
rise up to him as he sips from the top.  
We know about germs and manners.

We sing and flail our arms about,  
deep is down, wide is a stretch outward  
until our chests hurt, knowing this is  
supposed to be fun, as we grow tired  
of this un-named tiresome fountain.

We fashion deep and wide fountains  
in our minds and wonder how a child  
can slurp water there, if the design  
is quite safe, if it is monitored, for small  
children are forever falling into things.

People need a gentle flow, like a spring  
with a little gumption launching from the ground,  
not a flow like a torrent— like when the river  
overflows taking trees down with it,  
sucking in anything that comes near it.

My wide fountain is a series of smaller  
spouts that can serve dozens of children  
at once—time-saving, and no queues.  
We have fountain questions the song lady  
does not want to hear—she’s having fun.



Just as we start the song and sing one monotonous verse, she instructs us to drop “deep” and hum the word, our lips pursed the way a beginning swimmer does, holding his breath, his nose tilted up, negotiating water.

The next verse, “wide” goes, and so on until we are humming for two solid verses, mindlessly paddling along in a deep wide river, our questions inflating like inner tubes, imagining our feet going deep, touching the soft mud at the bottom.



Art by ERIN SOUTHER



# **Mollycoddled Young**

## **INIYYATT JENNAH NU'MAN**

We started as Red warriors,  
Struggling in combat for the terrain.  
As we attended the Tea Party of 1773,  
We continued through,  
With our Anti Red Coat philosophies,  
While Cotton Hands  
Still hurried to sovereignty's breast,  
And Monticello was Heming at affirmation,  
When Phillis was,  
On Imagination,  
الحاج مالك شاباز, Plymouth was our delusion  
Even as Having a Dream  
Still expressed our resolution,  
As the Chicanos cried,  
“¡Viva la revolución!”  
And The Yellow Power,  
Began launching our solution.  
Autonomy was what they fought for  
And choice was what they died for.  
As a whole they fought for the now.  
So our liberty and freedoms could be handed.  
For our ancestors,  
Were courageous in the face of demise,  
But now we the mollycoddled young,  
Make great efforts to keep independence,  
But we cannot hold on to our civil liberties,  
For we are,  
The Eleutherophobic generation,  
The Agliophobic generation,  
Wary of standing up  
Speaking awareness,  
While legislative aristocrats  
Take our human rights in plain view.



# Carrying a Reel-to-Reel Tape-Recorder Through the City Centre

SIR FRANCIS DASHWOOD

Danger:

being whacked by the umbrellas of men  
in accidental bowler-hats

being scowled at by frowning old ladies  
with pomegranite faces and

drooping

mouths

trudging through swirling clouds  
of dawn-to-desk workers  
whose lips form the well-repeated phrases  
and hoped-for health which never comes.

Sparrows cough and shake the grit from their eyes:

The sun, half-hearted, tiptoes in at sunrise

Over the concrete blocks.

A pregnant girl, carrying a greeting[s] card

and a telephone number,

a pain in her lumbar region.

Socrates shakes his head and lifts the receiver.

Played me a sad song

Life's a long song

The orgasm was ended

droning bees hummed

placated by the smoke

crawling on the moneycomb.

Rain pattered down to soak everyone

except Orpheus in the Underground.

Went to a café to get me coffee

served by the Madonna

with blackheads and crowsfeet.

Over the street I see

Socrates meet Aristotle

Bird plays cool through the breeze

And I shift on my stool

to see the lonely girl

with teardrop teacup

sigh in the corner.

Socrates might help her

as she helps herself

to another doughnut.



T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and Thomas Chatterton  
hallucinating together  
in Piccadilly Circus. Surprise. Surprise.  
Here we go round the merry-go-round  
plus the girl with kaleidoscope eyes.

The sparrow fluttered over an old bomb-site  
And saw the greenness  
of dusty grass,  
of rusty glass,  
and damp-induced fungus.  
And the sparrow guessed two out of three  
but what else can you expect  
from a city sparrow?

Trudging along,  
the weight was heavy.

Everyman I met  
stared at me  
like I was crazy  
and maybe I was.

Peeping through the railings of the park  
childless  
school's in again  
the swings and chutes and seesaws  
chained to the ground

Stop Man on the slide?

Slipped away sadly.

Father William bends to pick up a dog-end  
and he might never rise again.

The General marshaled his men,  
Split them into battalions.

Come the end of the over-rated week  
they'll be paid in medallions  
to show to the lonely girl  
with the sooty-fringe soft-eyes.

Translucent images.



Jazzman blows soft and sweet and slow  
The hooter calls the ants, sands of time running out,  
The Egg-man, egg-bound, Mass-production Man.  
The General packed up his troubles  
Madonna caught the last bus home;  
the later the better.  
T.S.E. bought a French letter,  
headed for the wasteland,  
Ezra pounding away.  
I have only words to play with  
Lend me your ears while I call you a fool  
Life's a lone furrow.  
The pomegranite old ladies frowned at me again,  
The umbrella guardsmen marched swiftly past  
Going back to Alice, Socrates smiled  
And I trudged on, through the city, carrying my tape-recorder.

## **People**

**DEBBIE MAYES**

People like you, People like we  
All the people want to be free  
Freedom of speech let the people talk,  
People who dance and people who hate blues,  
Lovely people, admired people;  
People faces, people races;  
Some people history goes without traces  
Of the past people,  
Of yesterday's people,  
Of today's people, with great dreams of tomorrow  
Some people believe and have great beliefs  
And believe in people who believe in other people  
Who believe in themselves.  
People are no mistake and that's a natural human fact



# What Happens to a Dream Deferred

WESLEY SMITH

Did you leave it all behind?  
Or pick it up off the ground?  
And did you try even harder?  
Did you have someone to push you further?  
Maybe you tried, just not enough  
or maybe that school was a little rough.  
Was it your fault or was it theirs?  
Or I could be those uncomfortable chairs.  
Do you ever wish you could restart?  
Or just wish you made it past that part.  
You just wish your dream was true.  
Not just you, we all do  
Sometimes we have bad dreams.  
But does that mean we still need to believe.  
And I know sometimes it's bad it seems.  
But when you pass you will feel relieved.

## Road Noise

A J I C

sirens, train whistles, car horns  
winding like snakes and weaving like vines  
climbing and clambering, starved for attention  
starved for the space in your mind.  
Breaking through windows,  
not shattering glass, sinking through walls to be heard  
the rumble of roads like a stampede of bison  
in a world that is now long extinguished

these bison who moved slowly  
through sprawling grasslands and open fields  
expanding and pushing, now growing outward  
growth without mind for your seeds.  
Shattering stillness,  
not holding still, afraid of what might yet come  
the grass building upward to scrape those blue skies  
where the gray now creeps in can touch it.



# **My Fable/ MI Fábula**

## **DOROTHY HARRINGTON**

Deep in the heart of the forest, a man sat alone. All the animals came unto him, full of sympathy. The owl said, "We don't like seeing you unhappy like this."

"Why don't you tell us what you want to have." said the sloth.

The man said, "I want to have good sight."

The vulture said, "You shall have mine."

Then the man cried, "I want to be strong!"

The jaguar came and said, "You shall be strong like me."

The man then said, "I want to know the secrets of the earth."

The snake said, "I will show them to you."

So it went with all the animals. After the man could receive all the gifts from the animals, he left. The owl came in and said "Now that the man knows a lot, suddenly I am afraid." The deer said, "But now the man has what he wants, his sadness will stop."

The owl said, "No. I saw a hole in the man. A hole that will never fill. It's what makes him sad and makes him want. He will keep taking and taking, until the world will say: "I am nothing and have nothing left to give."

• • •

Profundamente un el corazón del bosque, un hombre se sentó solamente. Todos los animales vinieron a él, lleno de condolencia. El buho dijo: "No tenemos gusto de verte in feliz como esto."

"Decirnos lo que quieres tener." dijo la pereza.

El hombre dijo: "Quiero tener buen visto."

El buitire dice: "Tendrás los míos."

Entonce los gritos de hombre: "¡Quiero ser fuerte!"

El jaguar viene y dice: "Serás fuerte como mí."

Él entonce dice: "Quiero saber todos los secretos de la tierra."

La serpiente dice: "Te los demostrare."

Tan el con todos los animales. Después de que el hombre pordria recibir todos los animales, él se fue. El buho vino adentro y dijo: "Ahora que el hombre sabe mucho, tengo repentinamente mierdo."

Los ciervos dijo: "Pero ahora el hombre tiene lo que él quiere, su tristeza parará." El buho dijo: "No. Vi un agujero en el hombre. Un agujero que nunca llenará. Es qué lo hace triste y hace que él quiere. Él guardara el tomar y el tomar, hasta que el mundo diga: "No soy nada y no hago nada dejar para dar."



# **My Time To Shine: My Life as the Sun**

**CRISHAUNA MCLAUGHLIN**

When my sister and I were born, my mother Earth would always say that we were going to be shining stars. My sister was given the name Moon, meaning Light of the Night. As for me, I wasn't given a name. I was called son by my mother. I was so jealous of Moon because of that reason. My father Sky loved Moon more because she would always shine and hated me because I was so dull-looking. I remember one day I was so upset, I cried to my mother "Why don't I have a name yet mother?!" She answered "Because you need a name with a good purpose, my dear son."

That was 50 years ago, and I still don't have a name; nor am I a shining star. One day, I just let 50 years of anger and jealousy build up and I turned reddish-orange. Moon came up to me and asked "Brother, why are you so reddish-orange today? Are you sick?" Just hearing her voice made me angrier than ever. My skin was now a bright reddish-orange, and I could feel heat rising from my body. Moon was so frightened that she ran to our mother. When my mother saw me, she yelled out "Sun!!" I turned around and looked her, still fired up. "That's your new name, Sun. It means Light of the Day." As those words sunk into my head, all I could do was smile for the very first time.

It has been 4 billion years, and I'm still the fiery star shining down on my mother during the day, while Moon shines on her at night. Now my mother is the home planet for Human Beings, who need my heat and energy to survive. My name is Sun, and this is my purpose in life. This is why I was born.

## **Autumn Lawn at Walden**

**JANE SHLENSKY**

Walk the perimeters of the raking space  
and catalog the trees—maples, hickory,  
sycamore, dogwood, myrtle, ginkgo,  
crabapple, pine and cedar, oak.  
Count, that's ten excuses not to start.

Let the flaming beauties decorate  
before you think of fueling a blower.  
Sit back, breathe in sky, humming  
gold red peach. Bold colors last  
only a few weeks. Don't rush them.



When you can see sky through limbs,  
your wife starts. Leaves, she says.  
The colors are down like diaphanous veils  
dropping until the trees stand naked trunks,  
gray with cold. There is a wind.

You blow leaves from the driveway,  
as your wife points you toward the yard.  
The ginkgo holds her golden leaves  
until first frost, then drops her whole  
cloak, like a stripper keen on impact.

Is it time? There are still the oaks.  
Why not let the yard go natural?  
The woods don't care if leaves fall down.  
Thoreau did no mowing at Walden, you say.  
You feel rebellious and sensible,

raging Simplify! in your Mitty mind.  
You have reservations about saving grass  
from leaf acid, thinking of all the mowing,  
edging, and weed-eating just to maintain  
smooth greenness beneath those trees.

Your wife talks leaves incessantly. You hedge.  
The oaks, you say. She recites her autumn  
mantra, that oaks are staid and prudish trees  
like old Puritans who bathe in their clothes.  
They won't drop leaves until new ones push

them off by force or winter winds fleece them  
of tentative flutter. Leaves, she says, leaves!  
Lawn, mess, leaves, leaves, she explains,  
and so you spend a day of slow repentance,  
assembling rakes, blowers, mulchers,

praising tree, but cursing leaf, thinking  
how Thoreau never married, died young,  
easy for him to talk simplicity, your wife  
beside behind around you, encouraging  
until you set to work. She leaves.



# Tree Poetry

JOY KING

The trees hugged me,  
reminding me I am  
not alone among us  
however it seems  
the voice is mine alone  
in our small lot  
therefore I must persevere  
so that mine may be heard  
echoing from tree stand to forest through passage to dale.  
Resonating, finding melody with more who yonder yore.  
Gaining crescendo as the storm ever gathers...  
yet lasting only a moment, hopefully ever after.  
peace comes with the wind  
peace flows through til tomorrow  
may peace be ever with you  
follow



Art by TONYA WALLER



## **Autum's Fire Wood**

**ZAHRA PARNIANPOUR**

Yes, i can smell it  
i can hear it in the wind  
The "crunch, crunch" as i destroy what is fallen  
Feel the leaves, the smell of burning innocence  
Something cold is about to grab my warmth  
Will you spare me a blanket?  
This doesn't have to be cruel  
But i wont hold you back if you leave

## **A Sound In the Silence**

**SARA M. LAUDEMAN**

### **I**

*I can't help but wonder, sometimes, just why things go the way they do.  
I can't help but dreaming sometimes, of days I spent with you.*

The words sound good to me, and I scratch them out on the sheet in front of me, my pen, worn by use, forms the flowing lines of my handwriting. I am an oddity. A writer in a city of mutes. A singer in a city of the deaf. I, a light in the dark.

That last bit sounds good, too. I write.

I don't have to know, I'm told. I don't need to care. They ask me why I'm not like the others. Why I can't see the pain, and the suffering, that we have been through.

To be honest, I don't understand. I don't know why. I'm just a girl. A girl on the brink of adulthood, too young to be told what's going on, yet old enough to be expected to work. Where's my place in the world?

I write that down too. Rhymes flowing together from my mind. Pausing, I think for a moment, tapping the butt of my pen against my teeth, satisfied by the clicking sound it makes. My illegal light flickers; I have maybe half an hour before the power is shut off for the night. I'd like to finish this, but I don't know if I can. I don't know if I can keep on pushing through.

Writing. My pen drags across the page. The straps of my loaded pack dig into my shoulders. Here I am, crammed into a niche in the outer piping of the city. The City. I suppose it should be heavy. How fitting. A heavy name for a heavy city. Officially, I don't exist, though. Unofficially, I am an abomination. Really, I'm just human.



Perfection. That's their dream. Blind, deaf, and dumb, but not. Mind-touching. For sixteen years I felt the feathery brush of a mind not my own. For sixteen years, I knew nothing. Literally blind, deaf, and dumb in my own ignorance. I communed with the society. We spoke, in our peculiar way, in images and memories. Secrets? A thing of the distant past. An entirely hopeless dream of the way things were. Imagine, for a moment.

The air is still here, sun warms your skin no more than once in a month. Rain falls nearly constantly. It is not benign. It is deadly. Beautifully deadly. The dome that protects us is also our prison. It is our salvation, we are told. It is our freedom. We're like fish. Trapped in the glass bowls and we spend our days ramming against the side, looking for a way out. Or we would. If we had the presence of mind to think that way. If we had the freedom.

I write some more. The pipes around me rattle and shake. I freeze. Hold my breath. Close my eyes. I curse my beating heart as the pounding draws nearer. Silence. My lungs ache, my eyes are closed and I have no way of knowing if I've been found. The pounding resumes, the pipes shaking as the 'bots race off.

Officially, I am dead.

## II

*Hopelessly hoping so helplessly, dear one, I dream of tomorrow.  
Wondering how did you see me when I was drenched in your sorrow?*

As the sound of the sniffers fades into the distance, a low tone rolls through my hiding space. The neglected service chutes still have speakers, then. I haven't stayed out this late before, knowing what Den-mother would do to me if I got caught. But I've escaped the sniffers, the 'bots that hunt on movement as small as my pulse. I hear my heartbeat, and I press the heel of my hand against the silky material that makes up my jumpsuit.

I hear myself let out the breath I have been holding, and grin giddily. I am a survivor. The tone sounds once more, signaling the half-hour 'till the power cut. I mistimed it, then. My light flickers again, and a metaphor springs to mind, the beating heart of a failing nation.

I write. The thick, red ink trailing off of the tip of the metal contraption- one of the last. I keep it well maintained, and even have the tools for refilling it ferreted away in my pack. Crimson letters on the white page. I fold the sheet up with careful, concise creases. My hands, clad in black gloves, are yet another contrast to the too-pure white. Almost mechanically, I pack my things away, pulling my light's cord out of the line last. I stand for a moment in the total darkness, waiting for the light filaments in my suit to activate.

They do, finally, but not before I hear the scratching in the wall. During the light hours, it seems benign, friendly even. But in the dark, even surrounded by the breathing of my pack, it's evil. I make a mental note to



remember this spot, even though I know that, most likely, I will never find my way back.

I make my way back to the den, following paths from my memory. I consult the holo-map embedded in my sleeve occasionally, but rely mostly on my feet to guide me home. I'm not crazy. Not insane. I am, actually, completely sane.

Den-mother has a severe glance for me when I slip in. She knows where I was. She knows where all the girls are. Always. I don't know how. Den-father's in the opposite corner, watching over the sleepers. We're over a hundred strong. Dead, all of us.

I see eyes sparkling in the dim light, the clockwork counter on the wall telling me it's almost midnight. Power shut off is soon. Too soon. Anyone outside their pressurized home will be dead by morning if they don't get in now. I feel sorry, as I always do, for the night workers. Shepherded by the 'bots, working... Always working.

I would know. I was one of them. That was before I sang. Before I listened. Before I saw. I shake my thoughts away from my past, and creep to my spot on the floor. I am not normal. But I am not insane. Beside me, eyes open, white teeth flash in a grin. I smile back, and he mouths a phrase at me: "What did you think?"

"It was amazing." I whisper back, wishing I could hold the fire that he ignites in me tighter. I need someone who I trust. Someone to be there for me. I need to get over not wanting help. I know that. I just can't force myself to open up to anyone. And even if I could, would I? I think I would. And I think I know he would be able to tease me out of my shell.

After all, officially, we're dead.

### III

*Flickering light of a falling nation,  
Faltering heartbeat of the newest creation.*

I'm dreaming. I know that. It doesn't stop me from screaming as the claws grasp me again. It doesn't stop me from screaming as I'm pulled away from my mother and sister. My father, already dead, does not see this happening. The two people I could protect are being taken from me. I scream some more. Even if I'm dreaming, it's satisfying. I curse the City. The Council. But mostly, I hurl abuse at the Federation. It's their fault we're still on this dead husk of a planet. Their fault we're still here. This place called Earth.

I scream some more, my throat raw, before I'm dumped unceremoniously into a holding cell. Here I wait, not sure what I'm expecting. I scream again, just for the satisfaction of the pain in my throat, knowing that they can't take that away. It's not like they can hear me, anyways. They're all "perfection."



I wake up in a cold sweat, and he's kneeling by my side, hands on my shoulders. I can only guess he's been shaking me, "Wha-?" I slur, still caught between the dream, that's actually real, and reality.

"Kat?," is the only reply, and then I look up and see the counter, arms pointing in five different directions, and bolt upright, startling him.

"Sorry," I mutter as he looks at me reproachfully. The dim light catches on the blue streaks in his black hair, and I, distractedly, hold mine out for my own inspection. My own red on black. We all have black hair here; it's one of those things I wonder about. I've seen people with brown, or even yellow hair in the den, they get cast out just like seers and hearers and speakers. Just like me.

We're not real to the City. To the Council. We're just a group of mistakes. Except this set of mistakes have weapons and a thirst for vengeance. I look back at Erin. He looks at me. I know we're thinking the same thing, and before he says the words, I say "Yes. Tonight."

He looks at me, something more than just joy on his face. I can't figure it out. Either way it goes, and I don't particularly care, we're getting out of here tonight.

Erin's voice interrupts me, "Den-mother wanted you."

I almost tell him that she can do something disrespectful on the Elder's plaza, and then think better of it. I stand wordlessly, catching his hand as I rise and squeezing it. My lips forming the words I have just said a moment ago.

Den-mother lectures. She warns me of the danger of staying out late, and we both know she doesn't believe anything's gonna happen to me. It's in her eyes. I almost ask her then and there what really happens after curfew, but I stop myself. It wouldn't be good to get trapped here instead. She gives me a sheet of chores. I'm cleaning the F sector today. I walk out, and without a backward glance retrieve my cleaning 'bot. I pat him affectionately, he seems almost alive to me sometimes. Maybe just because I've named him Whir. I and Whir clean all day, my thoughts as far away as I can get from the work at hand. When the work-day's-end tone sounds, I send Whir home, patting him fondly and wishing I could hope to see him again.

My pack's straps dig into my shoulders, and I relish the discomfort. It tells me I'm alive. They can't take the pain from me. It's my own little form of defiance.

Officially, I'm dead.

## IV

*Lost, at least, I hope I'm not found,  
Lost, at last, I fly above ground.*

Who said being dead's bad? I'm reckless, now, and that's dangerous. The sniffers ignore me, drawn by easier prey or, simply, my DNA has been



registered as “dead.” I'd like to think the latter, I can't help but wonder about the former.

I give up on that train of thought and pull out my sheet of paper and pen from my pack. I slip my knife out of a pocket on my suit and I carefully tease the latch on the fake bottom of my bag. It springs open. I remove the tools, the compressor in the ink-straw whirring softly. I snap off the lid of my canteen and fill the straw halfway with water. Then I steel myself. I turn the shining blade back and forth in the light, watching the splash of brightness flit over the walls. I pull the medi-pack out, opening it, retrieving a 'drop. The little red bottle shakes in my hand, the stardrop quivering with the shaking of my fingers.

I snap the tip off with my teeth and drag my knife across my palm.  
Pain.

I bite back a nervous laugh, not sure why I would laugh in the first place. I dip the straw into the jagged cut. Red liquid fills the empty space, and the compressor hums louder. I slam the 'drop into my flesh, grinning at the intoxicating rush as I watch the blood clot. Flesh regrows. Not magic. There's no such thing as magic. Only science. The 'drops are good examples of that. Who would've thought you could bottle time?

I catch the little drop of red that rolls out of the ink-straw and slot it deftly into my pen. Another day's ink. What am I doing? Red ink for a bloodied heart.

I write that.

Except I don't stop writing now, I write and write and write. My rhyming lines grow and run together, I'm not sure what I see in my mind's eye, but it's something. I can't explain it. I can't understand it.

I write.

Again, another tone. Low and fierce, piercing. Alarms ring. I scramble upright. The Council says we're not all here, and now I think I might understand. Why I *can't* know. Why I don't know. Why I'm scared of the sound that drives me forward. Scared until I run blindly into his arms. He's grabbing me, pulling me, I call his name, or I think I do.

Erin.

But he can't save me, I know that. He has to save himself. I try to tell him to stop, to give up, to leave me. He doesn't listen. He's just as insane as I am.

But it doesn't matter. The sirens give me a deeper insight into my existence. Why do they keep us alive? The Council could kill us off. They already have, in a way. But now I know why. Why we live as close to the dome as we do. Why there are so many of us, spread across the perimeter.

Officially, we're dead. And dead people aren't missed. Are they?



V

*When the night's embrace has left you alone,  
When away from innocence you have been thrown.*

Running. We're running. Feet pounding on the ground, it feels like we're almost flying. I can't help but hope. But no. Now we're running towards the sirens, and for a moment I feel betrayed. Betrayed by the one person I even thought about trusting.

It hurts. A lot.

And then I look up. And I know why we're running forward, and not back. The ship shimmers into being overhead, and I see the rest of my pack, and other packs besides.

I know.

It was never for them, we were banished for us. Salvation comes from above. I cling to Erin, and I hear him cheering, feel my own voice rising. I look up, and see the dome shatter. I hear the sirens, and realize that, of all the tones and rings throughout the day, *we* are the ones they are for.

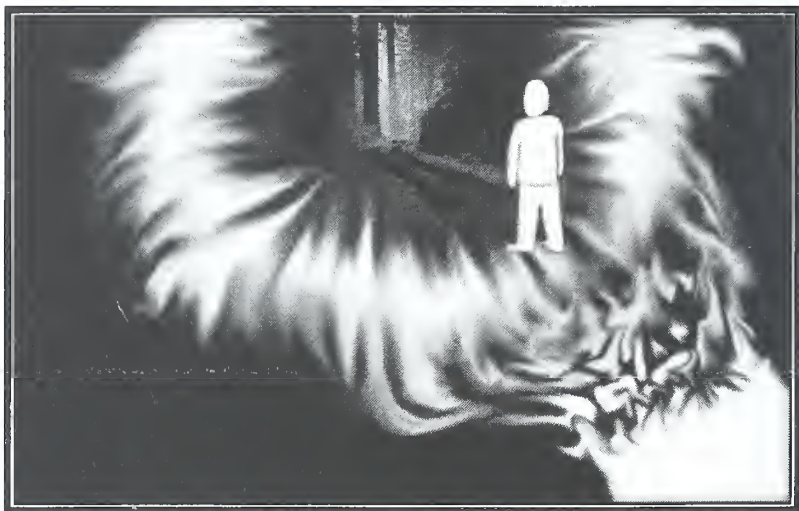
The dome shatters.

The ships drop.

People. People without black hair and pale skin. People with eyes that aren't the same as their neighbor's.

I realize the truth of the words Erin and I exchanged this morning. I catch his eye, and cling to him, hearing him say my name, Katrina, over and over again.

Officially, we're alive.



Art by BENJAMIN PEPE



# I Never Got To Be

MICHELLE BLACKWOOD

I never got to be  
Daddy's little girl

Our worlds were torn apart  
By forces greater than we  
Our hearts were left with gaping holes

An emptiness that  
Had to be filled  
Needed to be healed

I never got to see  
The look of love

That I see now when  
I watch my daughter  
With my husband

Somehow what kept me going  
Was always knowing

Daddy was a good man  
He had a hand in me

For all the girls who  
Never got to be

Believe me when I say  
If he could be  
He would be  
With you now

I am sure there is not a day  
When he does not look up  
At the same sky as you and say

Where is she?  
Where can she be?

If he could, he would  
Make it all just go away

Give you a warm place to stay  
Within his strong arms  
Never allow harm to come your way

So to all the little girls  
Who never got to be

You must stay  
The course that is true

Let your dreams be your ambition  
Continue to push through

Then you will one day see  
How you got to be

A part of him is written  
Deep within your very being  
Coded to him you are and  
Always will be

He is as good as he can  
He will never just let you be  
With you always he will be

I am still out here  
Surviving in this big old world  
Learning to be  
After all being me, is who I am

I will choose where to stand  
How to land

To learn all about, a great man  
Who never got to be



# Where Is the Sweetness

DEBBIE MAYES

Are there any kind fellows  
Where are the humble girls?  
Wonder why the sun's yellow  
What happening to the world  
Where is the sweetness!

Where can you find a true friend?  
This century is slowly coming to an end  
How many desperate beings  
Are searching for Peace  
To grab the stars how far do you have to reach  
Where is the sweetness!

There are so many starving young ones  
And our gratitude for the old has grown cold  
The fish of the seas are dying by the tons  
Is the moon really reflected by the sun  
Where is the sweetness?

# Dear Wall

CRISHAUNA MCLAUGHLIN

Dear Wall,

If you could talk, what would you say  
Could you help me understand  
Why my mother was taken away  
She was at the prime of her life  
Only 37 years old  
She was more valuable to me  
Than silver and gold

Now I'm sitting here and I wonder  
Why did it take her and not another  
Oh dear Wall, you know what's said in this room  
And yet you just sit there like a dusty broom  
Answer me this: will I be next  
To fall victim to the disease  
Called the Cancer of the breast



You just sitting there and saying nothing  
Makes me angry and ask: what is your meaning  
As I turn and head for the door  
I hear something go thump on the floor  
I pick it up and stare with whoa  
At a stone that's engraved with the word  
"No"

## **The Girl of His Dreams**

**ELIJAH MOORE**

"I think you were supposed to turn right back there," said the girl of his dreams.  
"I know where I'm going," the man said.  
"Just turn around," she said sternly.  
"Man...even you're mean to me; just like everyone else."  
"They aren't mean to you, they just don't understand you," she said, trying to console him.  
"Oh yeah? What do you know? You aren't even real," he said to the empty chair next to him.

## **Inept**

**MARQUISE KINGSBURY**

Stuck between a rock and a hard place with no room to wiggle,  
so I distract myself, talk shit and giggle  
I can't move, I want to fly free  
Do what I do, be where I want to be  
see who I want to see  
exceptions, plain and in sight  
I question my reality, my plight  
I'm aching all the time,  
can't cry though  
look alright can't let it show  
sitting eating pies  
looking into my own eyes  
staring long enough to get bored  
I'm going where feelings are safely stored.



# Forever I Will Wait

KYLE REECE

Forever i wait to see  
See her there  
Forever i wait to hear  
Hear her share

Share her problems  
As i have done  
Share her sorrows  
So she has somewhere to run

Run to the hills  
As Iron maiden would suggest  
I prefer her to run  
Into the crest

The crest of the moon  
On a lonely night  
For her to pray to the heavens  
With all her might

For only one force  
will give her no shame  
Only one force  
Will always remain

Remain open  
For her to tell  
Remain distant

To hear her yell  
Yell her sorrow  
As i have done  
Weep in pain  
For life has been no fun

The crest of the moon  
Is the threshold to heaven  
And i am the moon

I am here.....  
As is it  
But i will always be there.

The moon is there forever  
But only seen at night  
I will be here forever  
Though i give off no light

I will remain here  
And will wait to see  
And will wait to hear  
To see her standing, telling me  
this life isnt fair

For she was always there for me  
As i will always be for there for her



# Dear World

DONALD L HAWKINS II

Dear World,

If life is a b\*t\*h then I wonder if she likes me, because sometimes she treats me so good then other days may not be

I mean if it's so much like a chick why cant I date her to solve all her problems like my GOD did for me.

I mean I must be too blind to see the beauties she prepared for me so convoluted I'm alienated from her satisfactions I got to flash dollars just to holla

a chick, model, actress

obscure answers with the questions I asked her.

told her let me be king so her love I can conquer

damn its hurts to be called a broke bastard a pocket full of single dollars

my heart can't change the way she wants it, but I can take her to put food in her stomach.

O world why you do me so wrong

Questions that are plausible but answered all wrong I wish I can just be alone with you but will never be.

Not feeling at all penitent about the shit she did to me.

so how would u feel if you was me but vindicated from the world but not from your girl ain't that some shit

now you can understand and get this that's why my life is so insipid and listless.

People get mad because I speak my mind, and I get mad because I don't think all the time.

SO WORLD IF U WERE MY GIRL WOULD U GIVE ME ANOTHER CHANCE?

Or I'll end up like Luther asking for another dance.

I wouldn't take that last step because it took me four to get the chick.

Why does the world play hard to get, and give attitudes like she a bad b\*t\*h.

I didn't do anything bad to her all I wanted to be was her soil she be my earth.

Not the metaphor where she treat me like dirt.

Well if you didn't know words can hurt not as much as actions but can be worse.

So all I found out was you see me as a different man. I mean I could have been the next guy u date but u play me in my face so rude.

Now treated like trash.

It was fuck me naw fuck you.

because that was all you wanted to do. I know my ways can be complex but my words taken out of context.

Like saying I love u.



not getting all mushy. But it was a mistake that u took me in your arms and said words like that. Just a friend is all you wanted and to never speak to me again that hurt.

That's one of the reasons why I go to church.

Because GOD understands my demands and his promises are fulfilling.

So I'm given another chance to change for better.

SO IF THE WORLD TRIED TO ASK YOU A QUESTION WOULD U LET HER?

## **She Moves**

**BERNARD LILES**

There was a woman who stood in a desert, looking down at the ground. Then she started to move her shoulders in a circular motion. Up and down, back and forth until her arms were stretched to the sky. Next, she moves her head in the direction of the wind, while letting her body follow its movement. Then she allows the wind to blow her feet up into the air, as her body spins and twirls around and around as it gains height. She lands on the ground at the same time as she pulls out her swords from behind her back and cuts into the stony ground.

The force of the impact sent rocks flying everywhere. She begins to stomp on the ground and with each step the ground quakes and cracks, causing thunderous booms to sound. After stomping a canyon in the ground, she kicks out her foot, all the while spinning around into a tornado. Blowing all around are the sand, the rocks, and the trees, with her swords cutting everything to pieces, including the wind she created, as they twist and turn in the air.

She pushes herself through the heavens until she gets near the sun. She slashes the lights in thirds as they come out in bursts on her way up. She lands on the sun with a loud bang that sends shockwaves all over it and into space. She flips and dives into the sun, drilling to its core. When she reaches it, she cut it in two, causing an explosion that blasted her out to the moon. On the moon, she curved an opening in the rocky surface in the shape of a T before running around and leaping off the dark side. As she was falling through the atmosphere with fire balls following her all the way down to earth, she landed with such a boom that the earth shook for miles as her knees hit the ground. As the fire balls hit the land, she bounced off the ground onto a mountain. She stood there looking up, seeing a flaming piece of the moon falling toward her. She widened her eyes to see it better as it races to her. A smile ran across her face as suddenly the fire ball hit the mountain.



## Part Three

ZAHRA PARNIANPOUR

I never thought you'd have me left behind.  
I still hear its troubles through rhythms and rhymes  
You fought hard and yet your own world was feeble

I'm sorry for the wasted time  
I thought you were really mine  
Next time you borrow my time  
Be sure to wear your sign  
The world is too big for my heart to ache, so small.  
The world could cry if my heart would shack us all.

Leave not because of change of mind,  
leave thus shall crush the faithless mind.  
Your mask has shown its self too kind  
It's time to act and shut the blind  
Next time I'll be sure to amend my mind



Art by SARA M. LAUDEMAN



# **We Knew It Was Coming**

**A J I C**

Belgium.

Running away or dancing every day  
sleeping on boats rather than finding places to stay  
and talking forever and kissing for longer  
and learning to ride bikes to see who was stronger.

Germany.

Cartwheeling on crosswalks and debating long talks  
meeting the little kids fighting off chicken pox  
tasting the pastries and touring the beaches  
between the museums as beggars beseech us.

France.

Known for the lights and the food and the sights  
and the Louvre's over there as we're flying our kites  
thinking of love and ignorant bliss  
and forgetting to relish the moments we kiss.

Spain.

There's a heat in the air and a catholic prayer  
lingering near like a guest on the stair  
and the leaves are growing bright above  
as we dance in the streets and lie about love.

Ireland.

There's a skip and jetlag hanging like the luggage tag  
and weighing us down like an extra bag  
is knowing this is the final scene  
but still we flirt with the endless green.

England.

The dirt and grime announce it's time  
and though we cry we know we're prime  
because the good times lead the bad  
and these are the best we've ever had.

The church.

It's like the cathedral of notre dame  
and the beauty stills me with its endless calm  
like water too still and your heart's lack of beat  
as I cry my tears and take my seat.



# But Where Is Rock Bottom?

TIFFANY ELLER

As a young naïve teen  
Not knowing what it would mean,  
I put that needle in my arm,  
Opening myself to a new world of harm.  
Needle after needle, my veins rolled in disapproval,  
A pipe to my lips, longing for my pains, temporary removal.  
These track marks in my arm show  
How I grew, battered, broken, bruised,  
And dangerously close to you.  
Not an overdose, or a child's death  
Could make me see,  
Just how ignorant I've come to be.  
Following his lead didn't get me far,  
Homeless, in debt, isolated, and a totaled, brand new car  
Switching from drug to drug, from dealer to dealer...  
Wait, wait,  
This is not how I was raised  
I'm pregnant with our son, and will no longer do what you say.  
I'm done with the highs; I'm done with the lows,  
I'm moving forward, alone.  
You do as you please, I can no longer care  
For myself and my child, I have so much to prepare.

# Is It Wrong

KYLE REECE

[Is it wrong to sing this song  
Is it wrong, is it wrong  
Is it wrong to say they never cared  
Is it wrong, is it wrong]

In the end I have no friends  
They were there, but they left again

Is it wrong, is it wrong

They left me to die, they left me to cry  
But it's ok, because I'd rather die

Is it wrong to sing this song  
Is it wrong, Is it wrong

Those who love me think it's wrong  
Those who loved me inspired this song

A friend is gained  
A friend is lost

Is it wrong, is it wrong

With pain  
Comes a holocaust



Is it wrong to sing this song  
Is It wrong to say they never cared

Does it hurt all those who've cried

Is it wrong, is it wrong

I've cried and people sat and watched  
My friends, they sat and watched

Is it wrong to sing this song  
Is it wrong to say they never cared

In the end, who has friends  
They say that in the end,  
They all come back again  
Is it wrong, is it wrong

I have waited and no one was there  
Not even the few who said they cared

They were the ones who inspired me  
Inspired me to sing this song

Is it wrong to sing this song  
Is it wrong to say they never cared

Will it offend the ones who said they cared  
Will it defend the ones who never cared

Is it wrong, is it wrong

When they hear it will it make them sad  
When I sing it, It makes me mad  
Mad at those who said they cared  
Mad at those who never cared

Is it wrong to sing this song  
Is it wrong to say they never cared

Naming friends is useless  
There's too many to count  
Too many people  
Who said they cared

Is it wrong to sing this song  
Is it wrong to say they never cared

I don't know, let me ask my friends  
All The friends that said they cared  
All the friends that never cared

Is it wrong, is it wrong

All the hurt that I have endured  
Is thrown right back, right back toward

Toward the friends who said they cared  
Toward the friends who never cared

Is it wrong to sing this song  
Is it wrong to say they never cared  
Everyone has troubles of their own  
Who do they turn to to release their moans  
They turn to the friends who said they cared  
They turn to the friends who've never cared

Is it wrong to sing this song  
Is it wrong, is it wrong

Is it relatable to those who cried  
Is it relatable to those who died

Alex the great, Kurt Cobain  
Tupac, Biggie, Marvin Gaye

Is it wrong, is it wrong

We're they all completely insane  
They turned to the friends who said they cared  
They turned to the friends who never cared

Is it wrong to sing this song  
Is it wrong to say they cared

What about the people we never heard of  
The people in the 10 o'clock news  
They all trusted their friends  
And ended up paying their dues



Is it wrong, is it wrong

It happens everyday

It's sad to say

That it's the friends who said they cared

Is it wrong to sing this song

Is it wrong to say they never cared

Domestic violence, Rape

Is it wrong

Homicide, Genocide

Is it wrong

Wasn't it Stalin and Gadafi who

killed their own men

Is it wrong, is it wrong

People looked up to those in charge

The ones who said they cared

Is it wrong to sing this song

Is it wrong to say they never cared

Everyone has a story that they withhold

Everyone had a time where they were told

Told by the people who said they cared

Told by the people who never cared

So let me ask you one more time

Is it wrong to sing this song

Is it wrong, is it wrong

Is it wrong to hold this hurt

Hurt towards the friends who said they cared

The same hurt that everyone shares

Is it wrong to say they never cared

Is it wrong

Is it sad that I feel this way

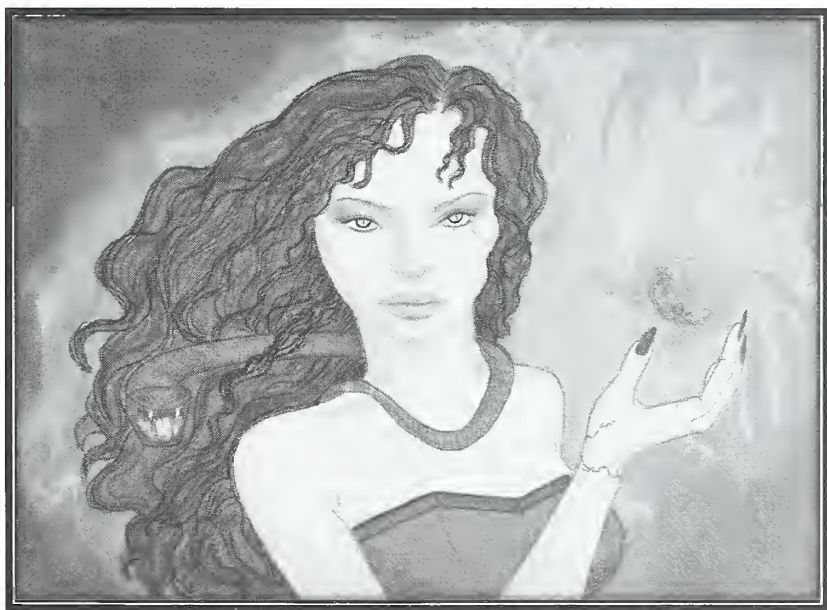
Is it sad that you treated me that way

Will you be mad when I sing this song

Is it wrong

Was I be mad when you said you cared

Was I mad when you never cared



Art by CYNELSA EB



# **My Time with Christian**

**SABRINA BOWYER**

The day you arrived was no ordinary day. Neither of us had the time to adjust or prepare. Your mother left you and I at the park, you see. Fortunately, I was able to walk us home as it was about a mile. One day passed, then another. No phone calls or texts. Your mom would not respond to me at all.

Finally, Lisa and I went to your mother's house with you. Most all your stuff was loaded into her vehicle. Lisa and I were stunned, while you seemed as if you did not know her. You surely did not want to stay with her. We loaded what we could into the car and made two trips.

It was rough going for a while, since we barely knew one another. You were set in your ways of being you. After 40-something years, I was set also. I had to purchase toys and clothes and diapers and food. I am on a limited income, you know? My kids are grown, and it had been over 19 years since I had a small boy.

Slowly we adjusted. You began to see that I would care for you under any circumstance, against anyone. Trust developed. Our love for one another grew. You began to realize I had become your primary caregiver. You even began calling my mommi!

We began looking forward to the end of my workday when I would pick you up. The days were long and hard on me, as I began a new part-time job at the same time. Money was so tight, like we made it off of less than \$500 the first month! Amazing is the only word that comes to mind. I know that was God's Hand in our lives.

You stopped trying to destroy everything, but I still had to watch you with the animals.

Things ended fairly abruptly between us. My heart was broken. You looked so sad. I sent everything I purchased for you--all the clothes, diapers, toys, bed/playpen, Thomas the Train Leggo set, covers -- all but one blanket and one stuffed animal named "Not Steve." They came from Isaac, my youngest grown son. They bring me comfort.

My aunt's voice rings in my head, when faced with a chance to get to you better. You came to a family get-together at her house. Kelly took a lot of time with you, and it was such a pleasure to witness the interaction. My aunt voiced her concerns about getting to know you only for you to be gone again, and she did not want to get hurt like that. I knew what she was saying was true. I thought I could keep my heart from getting too carried away, as well. I am glad Kelly was unafraid and so kind and loving with you. We have pictures that hint at her love demonstrated to you, but they are not nearly as beautiful as the actual interaction.

I have memories of good experiences together that I may not have had if it not been for my time with Christian. Christian was a mere 19 months old.







# Falling

SARA M. LAUDEMAN

*I can't help but wonder, sometimes, just why things go the way they do.  
I can't help but dreaming sometimes, of days I spent with you.*

*Hopelessly hoping so helplessly, dear one, I dream of tomorrow.  
Wondering how did you see me when I was drenched in your sorrow?  
Flickering light of a falling nation,  
Faltering heartbeat of the newest creation.*

*Lost, at least, I hope I'm not found,  
Lost, at last, I fly above ground.*

*When the night's embrace has left you alone,  
When away from innocence you have been thrown.*

*Raindrops of sunlight are falling,  
Teardrops of shadows are calling.*

*Carefully contrasting colors that bleed into ending,  
Sharply shaded for the love of the chase that I'm tending.*

*How long must we wait for the dreams of the ends of the days,  
When the present and the past never seem to part ways?*

*A light-graced image hovers in the dark,  
A darkened face in light contrast stark.*

*Blooded rivers flow across,  
A sea of all the loss.*

*When the nightmare's fear has faded,  
And the morning's light has waited.*

*In the darkest days ahead,  
Still the light shines on ahead.*



# Ah'lam

HAFSA MOHAMUD

Don't ask me who I am  
I am a rose never reaped  
I am a garden never irrigated  
I am a Moon never full  
But I still believe in  
Myths and fantasies  
I still believe in princes'  
And witches' stories  
I am still and still  
Waiting for destiny to come  
Waiting for days to pass  
Waiting for dreams to come true

لا تسألوني من أنا...  
فأنا وردة لم تقطف...  
حديقة لم تروي...  
قمر لم يكتمل...  
ولكني لا زلت أو من...  
بالخرافات والخيال...  
لا زلت أو من بقصص...  
الأمراء والساحرات...  
لا زلت و لا زلت...  
انتظر القدر... ليأتي...  
انتظر الأيام... لتمرضي...  
انتظر الأحلام... لكي تتحقق...



Art by SARA M. LAUDEMAN



# **Victim**

**ELIZABETH PRICE**

AN OVERBEARING OPINION  
A SHOVE HERE  
A PUSH HERE  
TURNS TO OPEN HANDED SLAPS  
FOLLOWED BY CLOSED FIST &  
ABUSIVE WORDS OF HATE AND DEGRADING  
EGO RUINING INSULTS  
APOLOGIES MADE DURING  
MISCALCULATED FALLING SHORT  
PRETEND LOVE MAKING

EXCEPTS THE SORRIES WITHOUT TRULY  
UNDERSTANDING THAT I'M THE VICTIM

HEART DRAINING TEAR JERKING  
CONVOS WITH FAMILY & FRIENDS  
"LEAVE HIM HE'S NO REAL MAN"  
AGREEING TO DISAGREE  
ENDING CONVERSATIONS ABRUPTLY  
AFRAID TO HEAR THE TRUTH  
"PICTURE PERFECT MIRAGE OF A FAMILY PORTRAIT"  
POSTED AND HUNG ON WALLS OF OUR UNHAPPY HOME  
JUST CAUSE I'M INSECURE AFRAID TO SLEEP ALONE

EXCEPTS THE SORRIES WITHOUT TRULY  
UNDERSTANDING THAT I'M THE VICTIM  
KNIVES PULLED,THREATS MADE,  
EYES TURNED BLACK SOMETIMES BLUE  
BRUISES HID OR COVERED  
PROPERTY BROKE CHILD AWOKE

APOLOGIES MADE  
MAKEUP SURPRISES GAVE  
FAKE I LOVE YOUS SAVED

PUT BACK IN THE NUMB BOX OF SECLUSION AGAIN.....

"WAKE UP YOUNG BEAUTIFUL STRONG MOTHER"

I AM THE VICTIM OR AM I JUST STUPID FOR KNOWING  
THAT THIS LOVE CANT BE REAL



LIVING BY NO PAIN NO GAIN  
BUT REALLY I'M I HAPPY.....IS HAVING YOU WORTH LOSING  
MYSELF  
TEACHING MY OFFSPRING TO ADORN ABUSERS

SET FREE NO MORE APOLOGIES OR LIES  
TO TIE ME DOWN  
GIVING MYSELF A THIS THIRD CHANCE  
LETTING ANY FEELINGS GOOD OR BAD BURN LIKE OUR  
RELATIONSHIP.....



Art by BERNARD LILES



# Country Musle

JANE SHLENSKY

The train is chuffing away from the station  
in a murky dusk, with you weeping in the rain,  
watching me disappear while I watch  
from the train window a pair of hound dogs  
sniffing through a garbage receptacle,

one looking worn and floppy, like  
an old handbag that's been emptied,  
ears and tail drooping and flea-bitten,  
his eyes red with his saggy lower lids  
puddled on his skinny cheeks, an old man already.

And I'm thinking, that dog is someone's buddy,  
someone's bit of soft fur to smooth,  
someone who will miss him when he finally  
lies down for the last time. And there  
you are, saying something I can't make out,

crying with your mouth open, sure that since  
we didn't work out, nothing ever will,  
that you won't be seeing me again unless  
another mode of transport, say, a sixteen-wheeler  
or a cattle carrier, brings me back through

this truck-stop town with my guitar slung over  
my shoulder and five dollars in my shirt pocket  
because my jeans can't be trusted to contain  
anything anymore. My hair will be hanging  
unkempt in my eyes, but I'll know you

the instant I see you on the dance floor,  
moving all graceful-like to our song,  
smiling at him, but thinking of me  
like I was before your daddy cleaned  
his gun with me especially in mind.

The hounds won't be around that time.



# Don't Go Out In November

DARIN REINERT

Some would call it an urban legend, some a myth, but for many in the town of Pipersville, it was history.

When I was growing up, my father would tell me stories of the *Knights of November*. Every twenty years or so, on a cold night in November, a group of people would be reported missing or found dead in Pipersville, Pennsylvania. The number of victims was always the same...four. Of those found dead, their tongues were all missing, along with their left ring finger. The Knights would take away or kill bad people, as my father told me. This was always used as a scare tactic in my house with my father saying, "If you are not good, the Knights might snatch you up." The thought of losing a finger alone would scare me back in line, let alone dying, but as a kid I didn't worry about that as much, for one reason or another. It wasn't until my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, November 16<sup>th</sup> that I became part of the stories.

The night of November 16<sup>th</sup>, I was helping my mother cook dinner when she told me that she needed to run to the store for some ingredients. My father was in his shed, as always, drinking and working on his old corvette. He wasn't a drunk, but he loved his Budweiser while he tinkered in the shed. I finished making dinner, called my father in from the shed, and we ate. It was unusual that my mother hadn't returned, but my father just dismissed it as some secret Christmas shopping. After I cleaned up the dinner mess, I played some Nintendo for a while and dosed off in front of the tv. The phone rang, waking me up. I was in my room, which was odd, so I ran to the kitchen and picked it up just in time. It was the sheriff's office, and they were calling to inform me that my mother had been in an accident. She was hit by a drunk driver, and she passed away in the ambulance. I dropped the phone and started screaming. It felt like hours until my father came running into the house asking what was wrong. I told him. He shrieked like a madman, a sound that I will never forget. We both cried ourselves to sleep in that very spot.

The next morning we awoke to a knock on the door. The sheriff, a friend of my father's, came to talk to us about the accident. He motioned for us to come with him, so we bitterly followed him to his cruiser. On the way to the hospital he told us about the accident and informed us of the drunk driver's identity. The man's name was Charles Woodard, a science teacher at the local high school. He apparently died on impact. Once we arrived at the morgue, we were led to my mother's gurney. She looked so peaceful, angelic. I couldn't take it any longer, and fled the room.

I found myself wandering the halls of the hospital, when I came to a waiting area with a television on, hoping to get my mind off the death of my mother. The news was covering some missing persons and the accident, so I ran as fast as I could back to the morgue to convince my father that we needed to leave. As I approached the door my father was leaving, tears in his eyes.



clutching a bag. I asked him what was in the bag and he told me it was my mother's belongings. I looked inside and saw a hodgepodge of things, but did not see her wedding ring. When I asked my father where it was, he said that he wanted it to stay with her forever so that she would remember us. We then left the hospital, and life went on...sorely.

Twenty two years later, on my thirty-fourth birthday, I was startled awake by my cellphone. Any time I heard a ringing sound my heart would skip a beat, ever since the night of my mother's death. I looked down to see that it was my father calling, so I answered. He wished me happy birthday and asked if he could come over for dinner. His tone was tense and reserved, not like my father. I invited him to dinner with my family, hoping to investigate his intentions. My wife was cooking an enormous feast, so we had enough to go around. Every time my father visited he seemed lost. He would jumble up his sentences and occasionally whimper for no apparent reason. The doctors led us to believe it was the early signs of dementia. I hoped that his medication would suppress his outbursts, at least until the children went to sleep. When my father arrived he looked gaunt, almost corpselike. His face was dark and brooding. His mood was the same. After wishing me a happy birthday he pulled me aside. "Son, do you remember the stories I used to tell you about the Knights of November?" I told him that I did and he then proceeded to tell me again.

"Every twenty years or so, on a cold November night, the wicked are dealt with in a gruesome manner. The anonymous Knights deliver vengeance to the evil and corrupt. Every time, eight are done in, and all in the same fashion. Four...four are killed. Their tongues removed and fingers chopped. For centuries the Knights have done so, all the while giving no reason or evidence. Always four..." My father clutched his chest and coughed. I sat him down on the couch. "Son, don't go out tonight. Stay home, be safe. Promise me." I promised him. "F....ate..." he said. "The Knights..." And then he died.

I awoke the next morning in bed with my wife. I did not recall how or when I came to bed, but it all seemed like a dream. There was no way that my father died last night. I roused my wife and asked her if it was true, and she started crying. She said that I screamed like a madman, then ran outside and didn't return for hours. I felt...foggy. My mind was clouded like on drugs. It came and went like the wind, but each time it lessened. Eventually, when I felt natural, I went downstairs and started to get my father's affairs in order. As I did when my mother passed, I turned to the television for retreat, and yet again to no avail. The news was recounting a story of a home invasion gone wrong, with the parents left dead and the children forever scarred. The bottom ticker trailed on about another story of an accident on Dark Hollow Lane. A man and his mistress were killed, apparently drunk at the wheel; they smashed into a telephone pole and were killed on impact. Just like twenty-two years ago, four dead. There was no mention of their tongues or fingers, so many would not



even try to correlate the incidents with the myth. But for me, there was no denying that a Knight was to blame.

Two months later I started to have migraines on a nightly basis. The pain would be so harsh that I would see flashes of light and I would scream. The doctors said that it could be a result of my traumatic loss of my father at my side. All I knew was that the drugs they prescribed did not work. My headaches got worse, and every night I would see bright flashes of light and would wake up screaming. My wife was a sound sleeper so she never heard my cries, but every morning I would document my pain and tell her. One day I was reading the paper when I came across a story about the night my father died. Apparently the home invasion was linked to the accident, and there was evidence that tied the two cases together. There was blood from one of the victims of the invasion inside the car. Now besides the fact that the man driving had a mistress, he was a stand-up guy. The couple killed at home on the other hand were uncovered to be the happy proprietors of a meth lab in their basement. Each couple had done something a Knight would probably find worthy of murder. Both were killed on the same night, and both were linked. This was no coincidence. I took it upon myself to call the sheriff and explain my logic. Of course my claim was laughed at, but to me there was no denying the connection. A Knight of November had killed those people, and I felt like it was my duty to hunt this person down. Unsavory or not, these people did not deserve to die.

After some digging, I found out that the couple killed in the home invasion were James and Emma Woodard. The name sounded familiar so I researched online and found that James' father Charles was killed in a car accident exactly twenty-two years prior....the man that ran into my mother. James did not take the loss of his father well apparently, and started down a self-destructive path. The only bright spot in his life were his children; those close to him said that he was a very good father. I chose to read more about Charles, and in some old newspaper articles it was claimed that Charles was beating his wife. She never came out and said it, but many people claimed it to be true. Unfortunately, there was no more information about Charles that was pertinent, but I recalled the missing persons from the night of my mother's death. The same paper had an article about the four missing persons from that night. A group of college kids were partying near the old post office, carrying on and shooting off fireworks in the middle of the street. Many witnesses claimed to have seen them, one even seeing a fifth person carrying on with them. The next day when the post office opened, there were blood stains on the ground and some torn clothing. No one saw them since.

It seemed that no matter which avenue I tried to pursue, I would reach a dead end. Stories died off. People moved on. My only remaining hope was that I could find someone who was there the night that the kids went missing. Weeks went by and my headaches improved slightly, but the pain was still there, foggy as ever. My wife and I were at the grocery store and I bumped



into a woman that I swear I knew from somewhere. That feeling that I met them before, in another life. Then my brain exploded with pain. It felt like the world was burning. I screamed and writhed on the floor. My wife came running and tried to comfort me. Then suddenly the pain lapsed and I stood up as quickly as I'd fallen. The woman... she was Charles Woodard's wife. I clamored down every aisle, my wife in tow pleading with me to calm down, looking for the woman. Finally, near the exit, I found her. She was looking straight at me like she'd seen a ghost. When I reached her she whispered, "I know you. I was at your father's funeral. I'm sorry for your loss." I told her thank you, and then decided to pursue my curiosity. I asked her about her husband and the night he died. She slapped me and said, "It took me ten years to forget that two-timing worthless pig, and I won't have you bringing that back on me." Then she uttered a curse under her breath and was gone.

I spent the next few months pouring over newspaper articles and newsfeeds on the net looking for any evidence that might lead me to find out how all of this was linked. Every time I thought I had something, it would turn up a dead end. Either the person in question had moved away, not remembered or died. I knew that the key was finding out the connection between the drunken kids, the Woodards and the adulterers. Each night in question four were killed; twenty-two years ago the four kids, and recently the two couples. I lost a parent each night...

This thought made me realize that the night my mother died six people actually died, and five the night of my father's death. The story of the Knights always told of exactly four, no more. Some of these had to be coincidental. My father's death was not connected, considering that I was there with him when he died. But my mother's accident could very well have been linked. But then again, exactly four kids went missing that night, so obviously my mother was not connected. But Mr. Woodard and his son both dying on the same November night had to be related.

My headaches returned every time I delved into the case, but with that exception they were under wraps. With nothing more to go on, I had no choice left but to set my obsession aside and return to normal life. And for the next twenty-three years I barely thought about the Knights and the death of my parents.

The morning after my fifty-seventh birthday I awoke in terrible pain. I saw the same bright lights and writhed in agony. I also smelled perfume which could not have been since I laid there alone in bed, my wife having left me two months prior for another man. I got out of bed, took my medication and went to work.

For the entire twenty minute drive my head was pounding. I hadn't had pains like this for over twenty years. Upon my arrival there was a police cruiser parked out front with the officer standing by talking to my supervisor. I approached the car and was halted by the officer. He proceeded to tell me that my wife had been murdered along with her boyfriend the previous evening. He



asked me to accompany him to the morgue to identify the body. I woefully accepted and sat in the back seat holding back my tears. I had always thought that one day my wife would come back to me. I had wished and prayed that she would realize her mistake and rekindle our marriage. But that would never happen now. When we entered the morgue, I approached the table she was lying on. I was reminded of the time when I saw my mother in the same state, looking angelic...but my wife looked mangled and bloody. The doctor told me that her tongue had been removed and her finger chopped off. Her boyfriend lay on the gurney next to her looking even more gruesome. The investigation revealed that they were killed in the man's home around 10 p.m. The officer asked me where I was at the time of the murder and I told him that I was at home all night. Surely my neighbors could vouch for my presence at the house, considering I spent all night drinking and watching movies. After my story checked out, the officer took me back to work and I was given the rest of the day off.

When I returned home there was a letter on the doorstep postmarked from 3 days prior. The letter had been written from my neighbor, whom had been a close family friend since my childhood. It read, "Your father wanted me to hold this until your coming birthday. I hope that you find what you are looking for." Tucked inside the letter was a key with an address attached to it, my old childhood home not two blocks away. I rushed to my neighbor's house and knocked on the door, but there was no answer. Pain invaded my body unlike any I had ever felt before. I almost blacked out, but was kept awake by the sound of a dog barking incessantly. When the pain stopped so did the barking, which I found very odd. I knocked again, but no one was home apparently. I ran to my old home with all my strength. When I arrived at the address I tried the key on the front door, but it would not fit. I tried the back door as well. And then I saw my father's old shed with a padlock on it. I tried the key...and the lock clamored to the ground. My heart was racing. Why was I so nervous and frightened at the same time? What would I find? When I opened the door nothing could prepare me for what I was about to see.

My father's old corvette was splattered with what seemed to be fresh blood. On the hood rested a brown sack, soaked in blood. My first instinct was to call the police, but I needed to know what all this meant. Inside the car was a similar sack, but this one looked old. When I opened the old, dilapidated sack I found a picture with four young kids standing by our old post office and...four shriveled up fingers and tongues. I vomited on the floor. Panicking, I grabbed my medication from my pocket. My father had killed those kids. But why did he want me to know about it? Why would he do this? And why was there fresh blood all over the car? I knew that the answer was in the freshly bloodied sack on the hood, so I opened it and found pictures of the inside of a home as well as a car wreckage. Both portrayed the bodies of a man and woman dead. And like the first sack there were four tongues and fingers. But my father had died before these murders. Who could have done this? And



then I heard a noise coming from the car. It was in the trunk. I approached the back of the car sweating, not knowing what the hell was going on. My body ached all over. As I opened the trunk I found the body of my neighbor, the one who sent me the letter. In his left hand, which was missing a finger, he held a digital tape recorder. It must have been on a repeating loop, but all it sounded like were the words "No more Knights." It was my own voice.

How could this be? I never killed anyone. Was I going mad? I pried the recorder from his hand and turned it off. In his other hand he held a plastic bag which had three fingers and tongues. One of which had a diamond ring on it. That was my wife's ring! How could this be happening? I ran from the shed as fast as my body would carry me. I almost collapsed on my back porch. Wheezing, I reached for the door when I noticed a pile of dirt in my backyard. My brain exploded in pain. I saw lights, I heard screaming, a dog was barking. I couldn't focus, I couldn't breathe. I crawled to the dirt pile in agony. As I approached, I noticed a hole was freshly dug. In the hole was a black wooden box with my initials on it. I remembered that box. I used to keep my baseball cards in it when I was a child. I pried open the box with my decrepit fingers. Inside was a picture of my mother and she was kissing someone. That someone was not my father. A second picture revealed that it was Charles Woodard. The final picture brought tears to my eyes. It was a sonogram. It had my mother's name on it, dated two weeks before her death. The picture was of twins. My father killed my mother? He must have found out about her affair and killed her and Mr. Woodard. Why would he do this? Barely hanging on to consciousness, I removed the pictures to find my father's cigar cutter and two fingers, one of which had my mother's ring on it. I blacked out.

I was standing next to my father in the morgue. We stood over my mother's gurney. She looked so peaceful, angelic. My father turned to me and said, "Son, why did this happen?" I turned to my father and told him that my mother had cheated on him and was pregnant with twins from another man. He stood there glaring at me. "Son, how did you know this," he asked. I told him that I had overheard my mother on the phone one morning talking to someone about twins and she was crying. So I decided to follow her, and I took pictures of her with the other man. "Son, why didn't you tell me," he asked. I told him that I didn't remember until now. I didn't remember anything until now. I killed those people. I killed my wife. I killed everyone. "Son, why?"

"I'm a Knight, dad."

The front page of the newspaper the next day told the whole story. The headline proclaimed "Serial killer caught." It told of the night my mother was killed and how a twelve year old murdered six people, not including the unborn children in her womb. It told of the night my father died and the two couples killed. It told of my neighbor, my wife and her boyfriend. It all led to the police finding me in my backyard clutching a cigar cutter in one hand, and in the other my own finger and tongue. They said that I had been self-poisoned, and found the deadly toxin mixed in with my medication.



The obituary was short. All it said was “Darin Reinert. Born November 16<sup>th</sup> 1955. Died November 17<sup>th</sup> 2012.”



Art by SARA M. LAUDEMAN



# Back Then

MARQUISE KINGSBURY

I have this urge deep down inside,  
to let loose and just unwind.  
Happy times are here again,  
should I really go back to what I did back then?  
My heart starts racing, my blood pumping fast,  
life in the fast lane, "Oh, what a blast!"  
Trying to cover all the pain I inflicted,  
Was I really even 'addicted'?  
We only live once and once is for all  
should I give it up and risk such a fall?  
I might never get up again, if I decide  
to go back to what I knew back then.



Art by TONYA WALLER



# **The Courts of Geneva, Switzerland 1700s**

## **The Dybbuk v.s I, The Dybbuk**

### **The case of wits and madness**

**RECORDED BY: INIYYATT JENNAH NU'MAN**

#### *The Dybbuks*

We settle,  
In sophistication  
Where specters stride  
And gentlemen stagger behind.

Where man once presided.  
Now brutes reside.

Impulses?  
We know none  
But know only the  
Agitator.

#### *I, The Dybbuk*

We arose out of obscurity  
Where man muted our illumination.  
And slighted us to be ablaze.  
And mocked us while therein.

We existed,  
Only to breathe in man's self constructed hell  
In man's shadow, we refrained.

And attended man gallantly.  
Their Sheppard, we were  
We worshiped him  
Ushered him  
And loved him.  
Though, we gained more alone.

Oh! Maker, our love, our heart!  
What does man say to this?



## *The Dybbuk*

We say tyrant is no man.  
And cannot reside therein.  
Thee,  
Ought to be regarded as naught.

Those wretched mortals  
Are cursed  
Symbolically vile  
Icons of our adversity.

Crafted by hands of foolish inclination.  
All are mistakes.

End, this phase of enlightenment.  
End, this phase of new renaissance.  
End, this phase of liberation.

## *I, The Dybbuk*

We, crafted by foolish inclinations?  
Is man not calling man foolish?

Is it not man's fault we are cursed?

Is it not man's fault we are wretched?  
Is it not man's fault we are vile?

Must man not rid himself,  
If man gives in to foolish "inclinations"?

Is man not a mistake,  
If man fashioned a tyrant?

They say we are icons of their adversity.  
Then are they not their own adversity?

## *The Dybbuk*

We do not respond to foes.

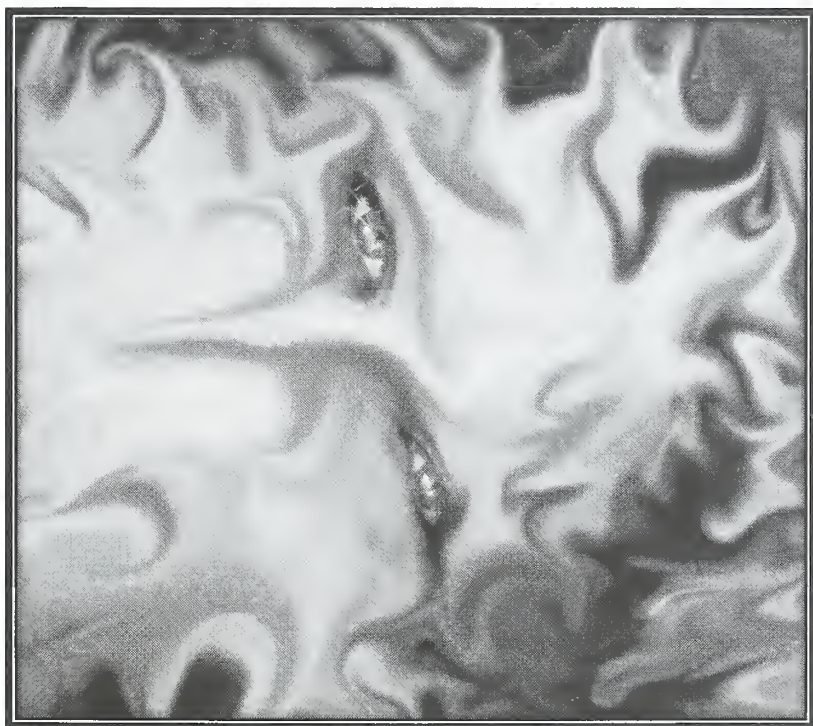


*I, The Dybbuk*

Aye,  
Man may not answer to us.  
Aye,  
As we are man's "foes."  
We do not warrant resolution.  
For we are man's wretched "foes."

A complex application man has none for these uncertainties.

Man recognizes ones flaws.  
Better than we.  
Man was created to be flawed,  
And man is now acquainted with their flaw.



**Art by Benjamin Pepe**



# **Closer to God through Self-Denial**

**CRISHAUNA MCLAUGHLIN**

The time has come once again  
For me to reconnect with Christ  
A time to be rid of my pain  
Through time and sacrifice

Coming toward a glowing rod  
After my every trial  
I become closer to God  
Through Self-Denial

Everyday feels like a test  
And it seemed hard for me  
But I try my very best  
To match up to my ability

Brighter is that glowing rod  
After my every trial  
I'm creeping closer to God  
Through Self-Denial

The time has now come to pass  
My test is done  
I have left the class  
With the prize I've won

I now see that shining rod  
After passing every trial  
That's how I became closer to God  
Through Self-Denial



# **I Miss My Kitty Kitty**

**SABRINA BOWYER**

I miss my kitty kitty.  
So sadly gone.  
My heart yearns for my boy.  
I felt it that morning,  
Afraid of what he may do.  
This was the first time, you see,  
Following me such a distance.  
Part of me felt I should take him home.  
There will be another bus. . .  
He convinces me he is going home.  
I continue on.  
All day long, he was on my mind,  
Even during final exams and work  
(Remember there is a meeting every day for me).  
All night long with little sleep,  
All I could do is pray and wait.  
Day 2, rough as well, as I  
Asked people to look for kitty.  
Day 3, maybe I can write.  
My precious baby.  
Gone.  
Day 4, He came home that night!  
Such a wonderful feeling.  
He made it back--  
He wanted to come back.  
Someone had him, I am sure.  
He looked well taken care of.  
We are quite happy once again.  
He is happy and loving as can be.



# The Caged Bird

KYLE REECE

Let him free  
Let him fly  
Let him soar in the great blue sky

Let him go  
Let him sing  
Give him a chance to spread his wings

He was caged for no good reason  
It wasn't murder, it wasn't treason

He was put in a cage of filth and dust  
The floors were dirt, the bars rust

Not much water or food to eat  
The bird felt hopeless and full of defeat

Let him free  
Let him fly  
Let him soar in the great blue sky

Let him go  
Let him sing  
Give him a chance to spread his wings

He sang songs of beauty and songs of dreams  
Songs only the desperate would dare to sing

He was teased and pestered daily it seemed  
The owners were cruel and very mean

Let him free  
Let him fly  
Let him soar in the great blue sky

Let him go  
Let him sing  
Give him a chance to spread his wings

He was a treasure, colorful and tall  
Valiant and brave, not afraid at all



He was truly magnificent everyone could see  
But the owner wanted him for himself and wouldn't let him be  
Talents wasted and dreams crushed  
But no one cared, not very much

Let him free  
Let him fly  
Let him soar in the great blue sky

Let him go  
Let him sing  
Give him a chance to spread those wings!

## **Left/Right Game**

**CRISHAUNA MCLAUGHLIN**

"Tomorrow is Christmas," shouted ten year old Johnny, as he ran right into his sister, Ginger. Johnny apologized and left her on the floor. He went into the kitchen to tell his mother. "Yes son, I know that Christmas is right around the corner," said his mom. Then she told him to grab a spoon from the right drawer and gave him a bowl of left-over cake icing. Johnny ate the icing quickly, left the bowl right in front of his mom, and then he searched for his dad, who was having a conversation in the living room. When Johnny began to talk, his dad said, "Not right now, I'm talking to Mr. Wright. We'll still have time left to play before you go to bed." While waiting, Johnny waited, hopping on his left foot, then right foot, then left foot again, until Mr. Wright left the house. He and his dad played games until his bedtime, which was right at ten.

The next morning, Johnny jumped right out of bed, ran down the stairs, and into the living room where he saw Ginger at the left side of the tree opening gifts. "Where are my gifts?" cried Johnny. "Look at what's left over." laughed Ginger. Looking to the right side, Johnny saw a puddle of gifts that was 'left for him.' Upset, Johnny looked back on the left side and saw that Ginger had open some gifts that rightfully were his. He then ran up to her, pushed her right onto the carpet, and hit her on the left cheek. Just then, their dad walked in the room and saw what Johnny was doing. "Alright Johnny that's enough! What's going on in here?" he asked. Without answering his dad, Johnny left the living room and ran right up to his room. After Ginger left, Johnny came back down and opened the left-over gifts. "Merry Christmas Johnny!" shouted Mr. Wright, who was standing right behind him. "I have something left for you that is rightfully yours", he continued. Looking up.



Johnny saw Mr. Wright hand him a small puppy. Squealing with joy Johnny said thanks to Mr. Wright and grabbed the puppy. "I'll call you Lefty. Lefty, my right-hand partner." laughed Johnny. Johnny then left Mr. Wright and ran into his parents' bedroom, to introduce them to Lefty.

## **Out of Time**

**MARQUISE KINGSBURY**

I'm tired of worrying about what's going to happen  
I want to be at peace. At peace with myself.  
I don't care what you think  
Take me as I am, or don't  
I don't give a shit you can be here or not,  
you can chew on that until your pretty teeth rot  
Give me a try  
I'll be the first to say goodbye  
because you're not worth my time  
companionship drives a hard bargain  
but you won't be bought or sold  
mom, tells me I'm too old, to go the other direction  
bless yourself, and put the shit on the shelf, kick it or kill it  
I refuse to spill it  
You'll never know and if you do, you're on your way out  
F\*\*\* your clout  
It's not with me  
Cut me, bleed, no other need,  
put some superglue on it  
no time to bleed.



# Death Is Born

## BERNARD LILES

I was dead and cold as a stone. The people looked in wonder at me as a rock-solid piece of meat. One of them, a man of large built, said to this lifeless thing, "Bardosu." And a woman, of extraordinary height, held my body, continued with the words, "Rodam wake." I woke from my slumber, crying for food and weeping for drink. Another large man snatched me from my mother and brought me to their king. The king said, after hearing my cries for a moment, "Beat the weakness out of this him."

They brought me to two poles, hung me upside down by my ankles with iron chains, and tied my wrist to a millstone with iron chains. A large man took a long steel mace out the fire and began hitting me as I continued to cry. These hits scorched my flesh and broke my ribs. With each hit and broken bone, more blood gushed out. As my cries got louder, he hit just as hard. Then one of the people shouted, "Silence the thing for that sound is deafening. Please do it for my ears' sake." The torturer warmed up the mace one more time, then he swung it at my eyes, cracking my skull. At that point I stopped crying. The woman who called for my death whispered, "I am glad that is over."

I had fire burning where my eyes used to be. I shattered the chains as the torturer walked away. I leaped off the millstone kicking the torturer in the head and sending him flying into the fire. The same woman yelled, "He is alive!" I jumped over the fire and landed on her head, then I beat it like a drum. The sound of bones cracking and her screams of pain were heard half a mile away. Blood poured out of the hole as I ate the meaty substance from her skull. I left her broken bloody bones on the ground, and ran after the people running and screaming in terror. Some of the people fell and were trampled on while others were pushed out of the way as I jumped on the ones that lay there, ripping their flesh and bones asunder, and munching on each piece. There were some people who attacked me with steel weapons. But these weapons I can avoid with ease, as I am small, and they are big and a little slower than I. I kicked them and punched them, shattering their bones and causing blood to spraying everywhere. Then I fed on their bodies too.

Soon, I noticed that I was getting bigger as I consumed more people. As I got bigger, I got stronger and faster too. They saw that they could not beat me, so they ran instead of continuing to fight me. I decided to go after their king. I ran to the throne, only to see the king with my mother and father. I looked at them with such hatred that my body burned with red flames and I walked right up to them saying, "You wanted the weakness beaten out. There was no weakness in me, only hunger. Now there is something else; it is a hatred for you, all of you." I ran up to the king and punched him in the face. That an imprint was left on it, and blood came pouring out as he flew from the palace into a mountain. My mother and father saw how I took out the strongest of



people, and were fearful that I may turn on them. I was going to leap on them when a force knocked me to the ground. It was the king.

He said, "I thought there was something odd about this one. He is a Butardos. I thought they were wiped out a long time ago. "

"They were almost eradicated, for I and a few others were able to escape the destruction of my world. I found my way to this world, and you know the rest." My father said as he walks up to us.

"They are a danger to us all" a woman shouted.

I jumped up into the air with my hand on the king's throat, "I am a danger? Is this dangerous?" I shouted as my other hand gripped his head, causing his body to burn. I inhaled the ashes through my nose, and exhaled flames that burnt many people and most of the planet. I looked at their charred remains. Their blood turned from red to black, and their skin from blue and white to black and brown. The aroma of their flesh was so unbearable that I dropped down there to feed on the scorched, cracked bodies. "That was a delicious meal." I said to myself as I wolfed down the last of my mother's people, the Bamotius. My father and mother turned to each other and said that they loved each other while I walked quickly toward them. I grabbed their heads and bit them off.

As I sat there munching on my parents' remains, I realized I had eaten 60 million Bamotius. I looked up and saw a blue world that was so big it dwarfed my world. I thought about what could be up there, so I decided to leave this rock, and head to the big blue world above. I jumped off my world, breaking the planet into chunks of rocks that flew in all directions, as I flew into space. I soared through space, seeing a lot of other rocks, both big and small, on my way to that blue watery rock. These rocks were of many colors, and they shone better up close than farther away. I eventually arrived at the blue world, but a large rock followed me to that world. I looked at the big rock, and I noticed that it could do great harm to this world. I punched the rock, sending it flying into space in thousands of pieces.

When I found some soft green grass, the first thing I saw was a large black creature killing a small brown one. The big black one then began to eat its victim. I saw how good the brown creature looked, so I wanted a bite. I pushed the big black one out the way and chomped down on the meat and bones. The other creature scratched me on the arm as it knocked me down. It was about to scratch me again when I jumped to my feet and kicked it. A few punches to its belly killed it. I ate both creatures then began to walk.

As I moved, I saw a man walking through the land. As I got closer, he stopped, pointed a weapon at me, and demanded to know who I was. I ran up to him, chopped off his head, and seized the clothes he was wearing. I walked to a place where there were more strange looking men, and women, too. There were also other creatures there. The deeper I went into this place, the more the people looked at me. I came to a part where people were exchanging gold for other things they wanted. I saw a weird looking red fruit on a stand, so



I picked it up and ate it. It was good, but tasted strange. The man who owned the stand said I had to buy that fruit, or he would call the guards. I ignored him, and walked away to explore some more when men in armor came to make me pay for the fruit. I refused, so they attacked me. Their weapons broke easily as I killed them. The people ran and I thought it would be good to have some fun.

I began to bite and slash the runners. Soon the town people were dead, but more came to fight. They used magic and steel to try and kill me; however I can use it too. The magicians threw fire balls at me, hoping of doing me harm. I grabbed some of them, fed on their bodies and absorbed their powers. Their steel blades could not cut me, though the blades could cut them. I was enjoying eating and burning them, but one magician shot a powerful blast of lightning at me injuring me along with killing two of his allies. I said to him, "You call that an attack? I will show an attack." I used my right hand to fire an even stronger thunder bolt at him. His shield was destroyed, and he took damage too. He stretched both hands out calling down lightning that hit me with four bolts, doing even more damage to me. I jumped on a hill punching him, and nearly killing him. He jumped back on me, striking me with thunder punches. Through this, I head butted him, knocking him unconscious, and swallowed him whole.

Then six large metal creatures, with barrels aimed at me, came toward me, with more men who had steel sticks. All the metal creatures fired at me, doing great damage to me and the land. The men fired flaming metal balls as I tried to get up. I was getting angry, so I blasted a few men back to the metal creatures with wind lightning. While we were fighting, two people came on a large four legged creature with a long nose. They, a man and a woman, held magic swords. They asked why I attacked their children, so I smiled as I blasted a fire ball. The man cut the ball in half and absorbed the blast into his sword.

Then, they all attacked him. I blew them all back, using fire and lightning. Only more men came out to play. These men came from the earth, from the sky, from the moon and from the sun. They all stood in front, demanding that I stop killing or die. I laughed at their threats and we pounded each other until we could take no more. The battle lasted for days; we were destroying each other with ice spears, fire balls, and brute force. The sons of the earth and sun went to the man and woman saying, "We have an idea to stop him. We need all the forces of the universe to join us so we can put an end to the death and destruction." The other sons shot so many ice spears into me that I could not move. I shattered them all, except one that I used to split open a magician's neck and ate both his neck and ice spear. The other sons were getting concerned that I would destroy this world like I did my world. They were nearly done with their summoning, as the skies turned black to show the stars and planets. The son of the sky shouted, "Don't you see death is coming for you now?" I laughed at that foolish declaration relaying, "No fool. Death is here, for I am the only death you should fear!" I was on fire, with red flames

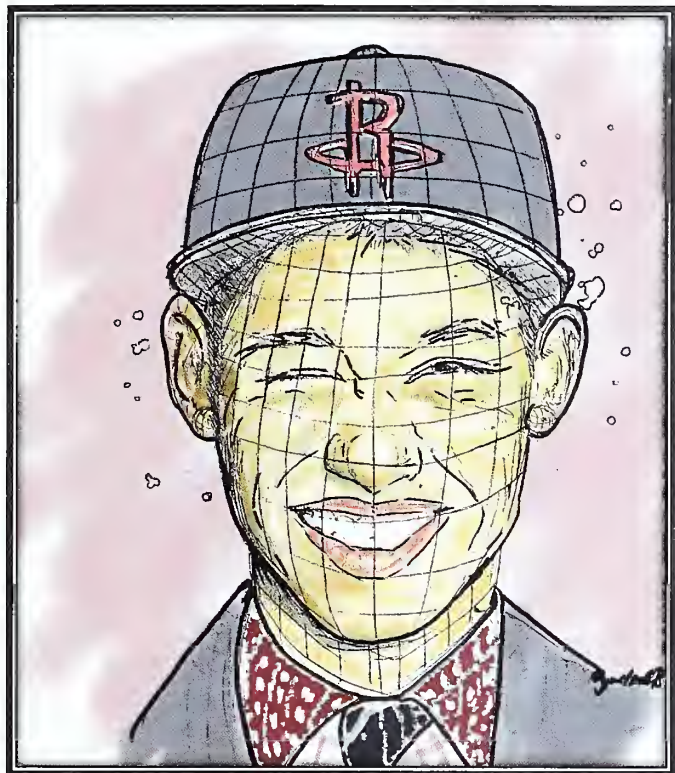


covering my whole body, as I flew towards the only three sons who were willing to fight. The son of the sun shouted to the heavens, "Come now o great force. Come now o power that creates and destroys life. Come now ruler of the cosmos and provider of the energies that light it. Come now o great god of gods for we need you now. Omegas Jetora." I was about to finish the son of the moon when a voice spoke that shaded the earth to its core. It was the great one who said, "Stop this now!" I looked up and saw a large black man with a light that shine brighter than the stars. His head was a star and the body was like seeing into a million supernovas combined into one being. I could only imagine his power. I smiled as he stood there in place of the sun and asked, "Why?"



Art by ELIAS SOTO





Art by CYNELSA EB



Art by CYNELSA EB



# Uncertainty

ALEXANDRA RAE COX

It's like floating in a dream.  
I mean a stream.  
No. Let's make it bigger!  
What I mean is: it's like floating in a river.

Yeah, let's go with that.

The stream, river, is calm, slow.  
Wait... That's now how these things flow.  
It tosses me around, it beats me down.  
It wants to see me drown.

Well... not always.

I think what I mean to say,  
What I've been trying to get at all day  
I can finally tell you without a single doubt.  
Is that I have no fucking clue what this is all about.

# The Great Grocery Hunt

TYLER TURNER

Everything was set perfectly. Rich threw the last few garments of clothing into the washing machine and dashed down the hall to the family room. Upon his arrival, a smile graced his unshaven face. Like a child he flung himself onto the old sofa in the center of the room and positioned his eyes to the small glowing television screen. It had been a busy Saturday. From taking the kid's to soccer in the morning, to lunch in the afternoon, to getting home, and completing the dreaded task of vacuuming the house, and even worse; doing laundry. Rich's moment had finally arrived, the big football game! He had waited a year for this. His beloved Mighty Men were up against their cross-town rivals, the Red Pirates. This was the most anticipated game of the year. Rich cheered as his favorite players in their deep blue jerseys took the football field.

"Rich..."

Rich desperately wanted to tune out the voice of his wife calling from the other room, but knew that wouldn't be a very good idea.

"Yes, dear?"



Rich perked up his ears for about 5 seconds for a reply then focused back in on the TV.

“Honey?”

Her voice cut through his focus again.

“Yes,” he replied. This time a bit louder and actually turning his balding head toward the kitchen where his wife was putting some dishes away in their white-washed cabinets.

“I’ve left you a grocery list on the table. I need you to pick up a few things...”

Rich’s heart sank as he looked over at his wife. He loved his Daisy with all his heart, but this was not any typical circumstance. This was the biggest game of the year.

“If you take your iPhone you can keep up with the scores. It’s just a couple things. I just need some baby formula for Lily, you and I both know she’ll be up any minute hungry. I really need a chocolate bar; you know how you have to make sure a woman gets her chocolate...”

“Ted Zegiwitz is down! He’s down!” Screamed the announcer on the TV.

The star quarterback on Rich’s beloved Mighty Men was on the ground and it seemed as though he had a bad injury.

“...And don’t forget George’s bacon bites dog food, that’s his personal favorite,” smiled Daisy as she dropped the shopping list in Rich’s lap.

“Thanks so much for doing this. You’re the best.” She kissed Rich on the cheek and walked out of the room. Rich looked over at a wool rug on the other side of the plain room. There was George, Daisy’s spoiled Bulldog. Daisy had always said Rich and George looked like brothers, both short and stout. Rich had never appreciated the comparison. He grumbled, got up, ambled through of the family room, through the kitchen, and stopped by the coat closet to grab his favorite Mighty Men jacket. Slipping on his shoes, he slid his iPhone out of his pocket to make sure it was all set for game updates.

After the short drive through the small town of Amber Hedge, Rich reached the local grocery store, “Good Times Groceries”. As soon as he arrived he noticed something strange was going on. The parking lot that was usually a desolate wasteland of cracked concrete was now packed with cars.

The whole town must have come out tonight. Rich groaned as he maneuvered his Chevy truck through the congestion. After making a full circle around the parking lot with out any luck finding a parking space Rich was half tempted to go home, but finally found an empty space that a camera truck was leaving. Rich looked puzzled at the truck, “what was it doing there?” he thought. The outside of Good Times was just like your typical grocery store, a big, bright sign with the name and flashy signs on the windows with the sales items. The thing that was special about Good Times was the giant “Good Times Birdie” which was a huge plastic bluebird that was perched on top of the “T” in Times, on the front of the building.



Rich approached the automatic entry doors where a young woman right inside the door greeted him.

“Hi, and welcome to Good Times Groceries,” she said. Rich took a double take at her. Her hair which looked like it was naturally dark was dyed blonde, her nails bright red. She also had on bright red lipstick and quite a lot of make-up. The woman could tell that Rich was making a peculiar face at her.

“Sir, I have to look good for my moment in the spotlight! I’ve been waiting months for this!” She handed him a sales flyer as he walked through another set of doors.

Before he had a chance to read the flyer, a group of new reports overtook him at the door. Bright lights and cameras flash all-around Rich. Loud music pumped through the store’s sound system. Through all of this Rich really only had one thing on his mind, the score of the football game. He weaved his way through the reports who were all talking about some kind of “hunt” or something that Rich really was not concerned about. He fumbled for his iPhone in his coat pocket, but to his dismay he had no service in the store. At this point he picked up speed, still nearly blinded by the lights, trying to continue his way through the crowd around the door. Whatever in the world was going on that night, Rich didn’t want anything to do with it. He wanted his comfy sofa, his football game, and wanted to know if Ted Zegiwitz was playing. After he had shaken free from the crowd Rich noticed people running around the store as if it were a playground. Food had been knocked off shelves, people pushing shopping carts around the store as if they were driving sports cars, and even fighting over items of food. Rich took the last remaining shopping cart from the front of the store and began the difficult task of weaving through these crazy people to complete his shopping list. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a crumpled piece of paper; the shopping list. He had entered near the fruits and vegetables sections so he decided to go ahead and pick up the apples that were on his list.

“Hey you, is that the last of the Granny Smith apples?”

Rich spun his head around to see a man running towards him as if he were about to snatch the apples right out of Rich’s cart.

“Uhh yes, it is...” Rich said glanced over at the empty apple basket to verify this.

“How much for them?”

Rich looked back over at the sign to see how much they cost.

“No, not the store price, I mean, how much can I buy it off you for?”

The man said jumping up and down as if he was a little child about to get a lollypop. He looked to be in his mid-30s, but his long blonde hair that looked almost to be styled like a mullet may have aged him a bit. Rich looked in the man’s cart and noticed that he had some children’s yogurt, a loaf of bread, and also baby formula. All things that Rich would need to pick up later. He then looked at his watch. He’d already been in there for 15 minutes; the game was probably heating up.



“What if I trade you one of my apples for the contents of your shopping cart? I know it may not be a fair trade, but you really seem to want this apple and I really just want to get these groceries and get home to see the big game.

“You’re in the big game! Nothing’s bigger on television. I know you’ve probably been waiting quite sometime for this night, we all have!” laughed the man, “and you’ve got yourself a deal, pal.”

Then man reached down and threw everything out of his cart into Rich’s and took one of Rich’s four apples.

“Best of luck!” Then man shouted as he whipped his cart around and dashed through the store.

Rich shook his balding head and continued walking on. After he had picked up some cereal and crackers for the kids he decided to see if his iPhone had service again, but to his dismay, it did not. He needed to pick up some batteries so he decided to walk over to the electronics section and see if there was a TV with the game. As he walked that way he had to dodge a large sundry of food being tossed at him and even people thinking they could just run up and snatch his cart. Rich was a bit confused about this and really wanted to be polite so he simply sidestepped or pushed his cart a bit faster or slower to avoid them. He also occasionally ducked his head.

Upon his arrive in the crowded entertainment section, he was greeted by the sight of strange riddles being flashed on the TV screens and camera shots of places in the store.

Rich took a deep sigh. He really just wanted to watch the game.

“Chewy and yum, kids chew it for fun,” Rich read on the screen.

“It’s Double Bubble. I’ll sell ya a couple packs.”

Rich turned to see a tall man wearing a Red Pirates jacket and cap.

First was the look of disgust from Rich when saw the hated Red Pirate logo, but then he noticed the man had a BlackBerry in his hand and it seemed to have service. The great dilemma ensued. Rich wondered if he should stoop so low as to ask a Red Pirate fan for scores. This was no ordinary circumstance.

“No thanks, but uh, do you know the score of the game?”

“Score?” The man chuckled, “I think there’s one winner and bunch of losers. No scores.”

Rich looked at him puzzled. Was this some kind of Red Pirate joke?

“Well me and my buddy have a competition going on so I’ve had to keep track of those scores.”

“Yeah, like a bet? So you do have the score?”

“Yeah,” the man said glancing down at the BlackBerry in his hand.

“6-1, man. I’m dominating!”

Rich knew that there was only one score that was impossible to obtain in a football game and that was 1. Sure you can get extra point which is worth 1, but that is only after a touchdown worth 6. He decided to just accept



the fact that everyone in the store that night was completely insane, thanked the man, and continued on with his shopping list.

Again his trek through the store was one of much difficulty, but he had gotten more accustomed to the people's strange actions and begun dodged them with much more ease. After he had picked up a couple more things and was almost ready to finally check out, he felt his iPhone vibrate in his pocket.

He stepped to the side to avoid a woman running down the aisle. Rich answered the phone; it was his wife, Daisy.

"Hello dear,"

"Hey, have you left yet, honey?"

"No, not yet."

"Can you please pick up some ice cream? I'm in the mood for a good sundae."

"Sure thing."

"Thanks so much, honey!"

Rich jumped out of way to avoid yet another person rushing down the aisle toward him.

"Hey, do you have the..."

The call was lost.

Rich once again shook his balding head and pushed his cart to the ice cream shelf.

A woman standing beside him, looking at ice cream, turned and looked into Rich's cart. Rich tried to ignore her, get his carton, and leave.

"Hey, this guy must know the deep secrets of the game!" The woman squealed out.

"Wait what?" Asked Rich as he turned to see about 15 people rushing their carts toward him.

"Follow that guy!" Shouted one man.

"But don't let him win!" Shouted a short woman in the front.

Rich had seen enough. He swung his cart around and began running toward the checkout. He just wanted to get home and see the game. That's really all he wanted.

When he was only about 20 feet away from checked out he saw a person with a bag of dog food, a bull dog on the cover reminded Rich of Daisy's bulldog, George.

Oh no, the bacon bites, thought Rich.

He jerked his cart to the left and began heading back into the busy store to find the dog food aisle.

"He's only one item away! Somebody get me those paper towels from his cart!"

Rich heard people yelling behind him. They all seemed to want the stuff he had in his cart and on most occasions he would have gladly given it to them, but this was no ordinary occasion.

"I'm sorry everyone," he shouted. "I've gotta go!"



He reached his hand out as he ran down the aisle and snagged the last bag of bacon bits off the shelf and dashed back around toward to the check out. Rich could never remember a time he had ran so fast in his adult life.

As he approached register number 9, cameras began flashing in front of him. balloons lifted into the air and there was even what looked to be a fog machine. Rich ran blinding through the paparazzi. to the register.

“What’s going on here?!” He asked the young man behind the register, who was dressed very nicely in a suit and tie.

The man didn’t answer. In his hand he held a sheet of paper and kept glancing at the paper, and into Rich’s cart.

“We’ve got a winner!” He shouted as he climbed up and stood on the register!

“Winner. winner, winner!”

“Wait, the games over? Asked Rich looked at his watch.

“Yes, and you’re the winner!”

By that point everyone in the store had made his or her way to the front of the store.

Rich could barely see from all the camera flashes and now neon signs that had dropped down from the ceiling.

“Congratulations, my friend!” Smiled the young man as he reached out to shake Rich’s hand. “I hope you enjoy your new TV!”

Rich turned to see two large men rolling out a cart with a massive box on it.

Rich read the label. It was one of the new high definition 3D TV’s.

“Th...th...that’s mine?” He asked, now feeling rather excited.

“Yes sir,” laughed the man. “Just show’m where you’re parked!”

Rich was still just as puzzled as he had been entering, but now he knew one thing for sure. The TV was his and he’d take it. So leaving behind his shopping cart, Rich ran toward the two men.

On his way out of the store, with the men and his new TV, he stepped on the sales flyer he had dropped on his way in.

He reached down, picked it up, and read it. “10<sup>th</sup> Annual Good Times Grocery Scavenger Hunt!”

So that explains. Rich chuckled to himself.

Now to get home and catch the end of the game on my brand new TV, thought Rich.

When Rich arrived home that night he was greeted by his wife who told him the game had been one of the most exciting games in history or so she had heard the commentator say. She then went on to ask Rich where all the groceries were.

“I’ve still got the list,” he said with a sigh. “But this time I’m going to the store on the other side of town,” he laughed.

“Ah the grocery can wait until the morning. We’ll make do for the night. Enjoy your new TV honey.”



Rich joyously headed back to his wife.

A few minutes later everything was set perfectly. Rich finished hooking up his new TV and a smile graced his unshaven face. Like a child he flung himself onto the old sofa in the center of the room and positioned his eyes to the large glowing 3D television screen. It had been had been a busy Saturday.



Art by **CHELSEA KRIEGER**



# For the Dreamer

DORIS J. FINCH

*Once he dreamt a dream Doctor Martin Luther King in hope of changing the world,  
It became crystal clear as a flowing spring from atop the mountain high,  
In a pensive state with his truest grace he declared so that all could hear,  
What none to date had dared speak of about racial harmony.*

*A Promised Land, a land of green, one that was flowing with sweet milk and honey,  
Such an awesome sight lent providence so that Dr. King might see the day.  
Come hell or high water, or the chariots wheels, or the lash upon the melee,  
Blacks would join hands of one accord saying "we are free;" "we are free at last".*

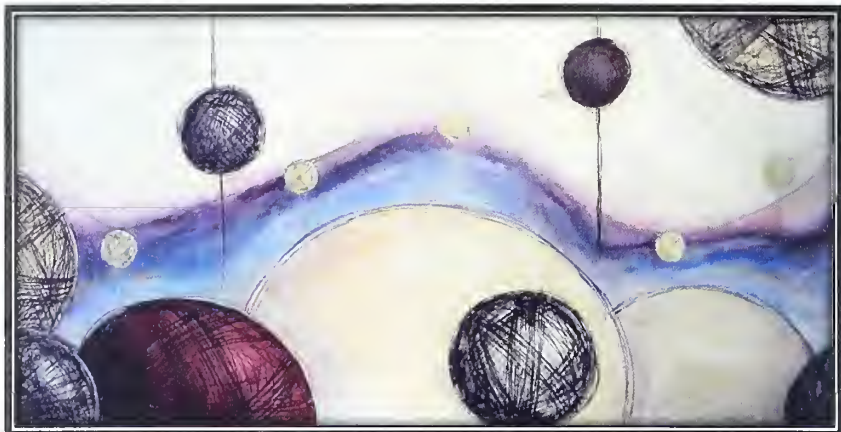
*Segregation, Bias, Discrimination and Racism had caused Christian people to pray,  
Men empowered certainly defied him, but Dr. King addressed that in a speech.  
His followers had feared were distraught and doubting for nonviolence was his plan,  
Dr. King never faltered and though he was cautious he was jailed in Birmingham.*

*The sands of time flow to an hour, and the following years eased some racial tension,  
Black children once called colored and all others now are attending public schools,  
But some people judge by black skin seeing only African and won't judge within us,  
Although anyone of sound mind would surely surmise that King might persevere.*

*How many people of color not just those who are older truly believe in racial equality?  
Do all even care or truly concur on whether Africans can be masters of fate?  
Or of those not so devout who are taking that route do they do so from ignorant bliss.  
Perhaps they are a bit vain maybe a little insane and care not for this nation.*

*Peace to you my brothers and to my sisters, whom believed in his miraculous dream,  
You live life to its fullest knowing God once anointed the man Martin Luther King,  
So into the valley of death and up to the Pearly Gates in remembrance of the man,  
Who once had a dream that would emancipate his race may he ever rest in peace.*





Art by ERIN SOUTHER



Art by ERIN SOUTHER



# **When It All Tumbles Down**

**KYLE REECE**

When your tears just keep on falling  
When the end seems to be calling  
And when it all comes tumbling down

When the evil spirits are killing  
When life seems oh so chilling  
And you just can't turn that frown around

When your time just doesn't seem worth it  
When the waves of life seem too high to surf it  
And you try but you keep on falling down

Well the best thing to do is keep on going  
And to all the battles you keep on showing  
Then one day you will win the crown

# **Why I Believe In Notecards**

**NYREE CHARLES**

As a child, I grew up in several foster homes and some of the families I lived with turned out to be cruel. The experience turned out to be more of a nightmare, but there were a few families that were just the opposite. As a parent, I have taken these experiences and expressions of love and incorporated them into a foundation for my own children. The foundation of my relationship with my children is communication. If we can't talk about it, we write our feelings on notecards.

When I was a little girl, I had a very difficult time expressing my feelings partly because I moved from home to home and feared opening to new families. My fear developed because of moving constantly. By the age of seven, I was already living with my fourth foster family. It was not already established in my mind that I would not get too close emotionally nor was I going to like them. I prepared myself for the worst and hoped for the best, but I was not going to unpack my clothes, and most importantly I was not going to call them "my family." I had already prejudged the family and the home based on my previous experiences, but little did I know that this would be the beginning of the best days of my life.

My foster mother was a very patient person and she tried everything in her power to get to know me and to find out what was going on inside my



head. She made a valiant effort to get me to open up and help her understand how to best help me and what I was going through internally. We often went shopping and visited some of my favorite places. My foster mother provided for my needs and I had everything a little girl could hope for, but in my mind it wasn't real and it wasn't mine because this home was only temporary and I would soon be leaving for someone else's home and start all over again.

My foster mother turned out to be a very crafty person. She had a room filled with ribbons, buttons, glitter, glue, colored paper and flowers. Whatever you needed, she had it. I found this room to be more interesting than my own bedroom that was filled with toys from one end of the room to the other. One day, she asked if I would help her organize this room with her. Amongst all the clutter, I found a box filled with blank notecards. I could not understand why she had so many blank cards, so one day I asked her and she told me that whenever she had something to say to someone such as an encouraging word, a get well wish, or just to let someone know she was thinking about them, she would write it on a notecard and send it to them. She explained that she decorated them and personalizes them for the person she is giving it to. I guess she stocked up for a rainy day with notecards.

I woke up the next morning and to my surprise there was a beautiful notecard personalized just for me. I remember it just like it was yesterday. It was bright pink and purple, shimmering with glitter and embroidered with a satin ribbon. My card simply stated, "Thank you!" From that day forward I received cards for the first day of school, when I was feeling sad, for a job well done, for my birthday, and most of all just to be told I was loved.

I only lived with Mrs. Maddox for five years, but what she gave me was priceless. I learned how to express myself with words and creativity, but most importantly I learned that it is imperative you let someone know how you feel about them. Mrs. Maddox made my day time and time again by just writing the words "I love you" or "sorry you had a bad day." It's amazing how simple this was, but life sometimes can be very simple and little things sometimes make more of an impact than money or material things.

I have three children, two boys and one girl. Each of my children shares a unique bond with me, but I wanted to find something special that only my daughter and I would share. I wanted to find a way to keep a line of communication open with her. In her teenage years I see how difficult it has become for her to express herself verbally. Now, we create notecards. We make them for other people as well as each other. We can talk about almost everything, but sometimes there are feelings that are difficult to express verbally. This is why I believe in notecards.



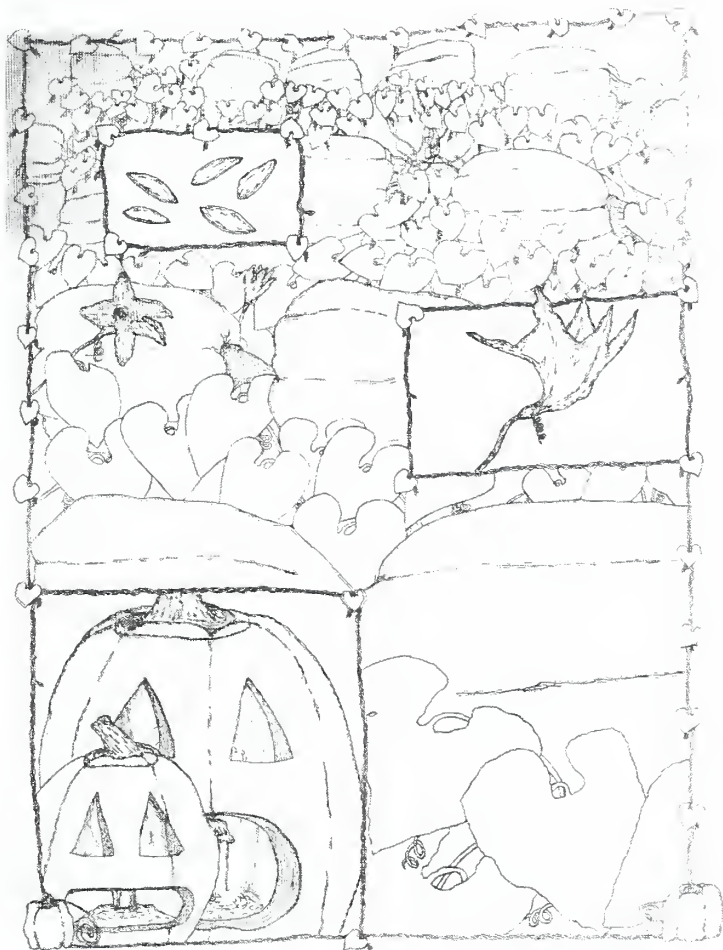
## By Ear

JANE SHLENSKY

my dulcimer hums  
a melody beckons  
my fingers search

wind and rain  
joy and pain  
a string breaks

love consumes me



Art by GREY LUDLUM



# El Paso Básico

## LANCE LEE

I want you to find a soundtrack playing when you read this. It begins and ends with one word: bachata.

You'll know it when you've found it. The swaying rhythm will make you feel like you're in a hammock in the Dominican Republic, where bachata was born. If you're listening to a song on the classic side, it will be slow, or maybe you found something a little faster, more modern.

Uno, dos, tres, toca,  
Uno, dos, tres, toca,  
Uno, dos, tres, toca,  
Uno, dos, tres, toca.

You already know the beat, ¿verdad?

Because bachata resides in your soul. Because bachata wasn't really born in the 20<sup>th</sup> century like they say. Because bachata has you in its arms before you ever heard it. Because bachata is as old as the universe. Because bachata is music. Because bachata is part of a cosmic rhythm.

You're going to feel a warmth come from within as you keep listening to the twang of the guitar. The bouncing rhythm always sounds a little lopsided. The song rocks back and forth, but never completely falls apart. The music keeps driving.

You can see the dancers now, and they aren't stopping. Watch them.

Gliding, holding, loving, touch.  
Thinking, smiling, wanting, touch.  
Hurting, praying, crying, touch.  
Living, dying, striving, touch.

The music sounds happy, but the lyrics can be so sad. The next song comes on and you join in the cycle.



## **The Intimate Me**

**CYNTHIA B. DAVIS**

Breaking all rules with regards to writing things down on paper  
I have found myself constantly thinking fond thoughts of you  
In the essence of what things would feel like or how things would feel  
Only coming to a sensuous conclusion astounded by clouds and puffs of light air  
Only looking to reach and grab what cannot be felt  
But touched by my imaginative thinking  
AAH-The Wind- passing all around me  
Yet piercing my soul into a state of helplessness  
My mind speaks to my body  
My body speaks to your mind  
It says "Take me now.....While I'm in flight, never to be grounded again"

## **Just a Bottle**

**ZAHRA PARNIANPOUR**

i wish your love would fit in a bottle  
something i could keep, drink and sip as i go  
every time i think of a kiss  
every time it seems impossible to let go



**Art by INIYYATT JENNAH NU'MAN**



# Rose and Raven

EEYI OON

Once upon a time, in the land where the heather glows purple in the summer gloaming, there lived a good crofter named Collin and his wife, Mara. They were perfectly happy, for they had two well-brought up sons, enough food, and a house just the right size for the four of them. Collin worked hard on the farm, Mara raised their children well, and they were careful of the wee folk. At this time, Mara and Collin were expecting a third child.

She was named Rosalinn. At her christening, Collin and Mara called the fairy grandmother Rosalinn's godmother. The fairies, elves, dragons, and the local unicorn all gave gifts--mostly sensible things, like diapers and playthings, but the godmother had something else in mind. When it was her turn to give a gift, she said to them, "It has been years since I had a bairn of my own. Ask for your child, and I shall give unto you."

After some deliberation, Mara said, "I ask that she never be burned by fire nor drowned in water."

Collin said, "I ask that she never fall in love with a cad."

Smiling sadly, the fairy godmother said, "I will give more than you have asked. Rosalinn will indeed never be burned or drowned—she will have the wings of a dove to escape any calamity. She will never fall in love with a lad of whom you disapprove, for she shall love only a raven." Collin and Mara were puzzled. Who could love a raven, a carrion-eater? Who could love that which feasted on the slain and delighted in death?

Being good people, Collin and Mara were embarrassed at having asked for so much, but the fairy godmother did not seem angry, so after a few years, they thought no more on the fairy's part in Rosalinn's life. As for the fairy, she had meant well, but as fairies often do, had her own reasons for doing things.

So Rosalinn grew, every day a challenge. She tried to befriend the other village children, but that failed after they saw the soft expanse of her white wings. She ran with her brothers and their friends--until they went to university. One day, she came across a wide glen, where a raven was building a nest.

Rosalinn tiptoed towards it, waiting for it to fly away in haste, as many birds had flown before. It looked at her with dark, contemplative eyes. "A fine good morning to you, raven."

It nodded its head at her.

Rosalinn's eyes widened, and she stumbled back, tripping over a root. The raven fluttered down to where she sprawled on the moor and pecked at her arm.

"Ow! Hey!"

The raven tilted his head at her and managed to look remorseful.



That was the beginning of their friendship. Rosalinn would run to the little glen where the raven had made its nest and tell it her troubles. They chased each other over hills and under the forest canopy; they raced across wide fields. The raven brought Rosalinn small bits of glass or beads and other odds and ends dropped by unwary travelers. When she could disentangle herself from her chores, she ran out to meet her best friend. She brought the raven inside during the winter, much to her mother's dismay, and nearly lived outside in the raven's glen all the summer.

One blustery winter day, Rosalinn was helping her mother wind yarn into balls. After several winters spent in Rosalinn's home, there were few nooks and crannies in the little stone house that the raven had not poked its beak into. Rosalinn watched it explore the spaces behind the cupboards and under the beds. It hopped under the bed, looked around, and hopped back out, shaking its head as if looking for something. She knelt down beside it and peered under the bed.

"Rosalinn, what are you doing?" her mother asked.

"I want to know what our raven is after, and I can't very well ask him."

"It's probably a bit of fluff or a scrap of thread he's thinking to use for his nest. Come back here and hold this bit of yarn."

Rosalinn did as her mother asked, but the raven kept looking and shaking its head. "What are you looking for?" she asked it.

It looked at her and cawed agitatedly. It hopped all over the house and flapped its wings. It cawed even louder.

"It's a pity humans and birds speak with different tongues, or I'd know already what you were looking for."

With a sigh, Rosalinn tried to ignore the raven's snooping. Suddenly, the door to the little house flew open, admitting a gust of wind and a flurry of snow. The raven was gone from the cottage. Rosalinn leapt up and hurried to the door. "Mother, it can't be safe for the raven to be out on a day like this."

"A day not fit for ravens is a day not fit for little girls," protested her mother.

But Rosalinn had already left.

The world outside was full of a blinding whiteness despite the sun's absence. Regretting her haste, which had left her sorely unprepared for the cold, Rosalinn stumbled through the snow. Surely a raven's darkness would stand out against the blinding snow. After a frustrating search, she finally found the raven's glen. The raven was pulling apart its nest.

"Raven!" called Rosalinn. "Come back inside with me. You'll freeze to your death."

The raven started at the sound of her voice and flew off to another tree, as a wild bird would. "What on earth are you doing, little feathered rascal? Come back with me so we won't both freeze."

The raven swung its head from side to side, as if shaking its head.



Infuriated, Rosalinn ripped a sharp stick from a nearby tree and hurled it at the raven. A feather fell and the raven winged away to the east, cawing in pain. A drop of blood fell from its wing onto the thick snow.

Rosalinn felt a stab of remorse and stared off into the darkening eastern sky. She unfurled her wings and was about to follow the raven when, suddenly, her fairy godmother appeared by her side. "What new havoc have you wreaked now?" asked her fairy godmother, taking Rosalinn's arm. Rosalinn said nothing. "You have lost your only friend, have you not?"

Rosalinn spluttered, "And what is that tae ye? 'Twas ye wha' put the curse on me."

"Hush, child," the fairy godmother gently admonished. "This is what you must do to find your raven. You must fly to the land of the east and speak only to the one whose hair is dark and straight as a raven's feather, whose hands are red as the raven's blood and whose face is pale as the last sunlight on the snow." Rosalinn shivered, imagining a faceless monster, pale like a grub, whose hands were stained with the blood of its prey. "And don't be looking for a raven," added the fairy godmother with a half-smile as she walked away. Rosalinn was not comforted in the least.

Now alone in the valley, Rosalinn climbed the highest tree on the nearest hill and leaped off it, too puzzled and frustrated to enjoy the feel of her wings in the air. She flew for a year and a day, stopping only to hunt and sleep. When she thought she could fly no more, she landed in a town of the land of the east. She was tired and soon fell into despair as she saw that all the folk of the land of the east had dark, straight hair. The first one she nearly spoke to was a butcher with blood-stained hands. However, she had kept the raven's feather for reference, and she compared it with the butcher's hair. The butcher's hair was terribly kinky and was not quite dark enough, and his skin was not the color of snow in the sunset. Besides, he cursed and shouted at her. Rosalinn could not speak the language, but she knew, as most people do, when she was being cursed. To be fair to the butcher, not many red-headed lasses with wings were found in that country, and like many, he feared what he did not know. Thinking she was a demon, he roused up a crowd who chased her out of the town. She spent the night in a tree that overlooked the town wall and continued her search the next morning.

In a nearby field, she saw a camp of soldiers. There were many dark-haired men among them, and most of them had bloody knuckles from training, but none of them could match the raven's feather and none of them had faces the color of snow in the sunset. The soldiers surrounded her and escorted her roughly back into the town. Now caught between the butcher's rabble and the soldiers, Rosalinn looked for a hiding place from which she could continue her search. A pair of red doors stood a short sprint away from the town gate. Summoning a burst of energy from deep within, she dashed to the red doors and threw them open, hastily pushing them closed behind her. Mysteriously, although the crowd banged on the doors, they stayed firmly shut. Rosalinn



found herself in a garden filled with unfamiliar plants and trees. Strangely shaped stones dotted the garden, and winding paths intertwined and connected. The noise of the crowd was a faint clamor that barely penetrated the walls around the garden. A perfectly still, clear pond reflected Rosalinn's image back to her. Her hair had become a wild tangle and her face was streaked with dirt. In the quiet perfection of the garden, she felt absurdly self-conscious. Rosalinn did not usually care about her appearance, but she was appalled by her reflection. She attempted to straighten out her hair and washed her face with the pond water. It wasn't particularly hygienic, but it would have to do for now.

"Are you often in the habit of washing your face in other people's gardens?"

Embarrassed, Rosalinn turned towards the voice. A dark-haired man was calmly standing behind her, wiping his hands on a cloth. With a start, Rosalinn noticed that he was wiping *blood* off his hands. So that made his hands red with blood. His hair was certainly as dark and straight as the raven's feather, and his skin was the shade of a winter day's last sunlight on the snow. He was what Rosalinn had been seeking.

"I—I beg your pardon. I didn't see you there."

"Ah. So washing your face in a pond in a stranger's garden is acceptable when other people aren't watching." His calm, almost friendly demeanor and quiet smile seemed at one with the peace of the garden. He wore flowing silk robes—certainly not practical attire for the violent cannibalistic monster Rosalinn had been imagining. He was still wiping his hands on the blood-stained rag, though. "Well, what *are* you doing in my garden?"

"I'm—ah. To be truthful, I was looking for you."

"I see. Would you like to have a cup of tea? I have a feeling this will be a long story."

Something about his invitation stuck Rosalinn. She laughed. "There are at least a hundred people seeking my blood outside and you want me to have tea."

He beamed. "That's exactly how I solve problems. With lots of tea. My house is at the end of the garden. You can wait in there while I sort out the people outside."

Sort out? Rosalinn wondered exactly how he planned to do that, but headed for the house anyway. She opened the door and peered inside.

"Aiee!" cried a young girl who had been embroidering in a room near the door. She ran shrieking into the rest of the house. After a moment of awkwardly standing there, Rosalinn wandered about the house. One room contained nothing but a desk with papers and brushes strewn all over it. Strange wispy symbols covered the papers, and a stone inkwell reposed in one corner of the desk. Another room was filled with bookshelves. Rosalinn pulled one off and examined it. Within were the same strange characters that she had seen on the desk. Hearing the door to the house open, she put it back guiltily.



The owner of the house smiled at her. "The crowd has been taken care of, just as I said." He was still holding the bloody rag, which was making Rosalinn very uneasy.

He followed her gaze to the stained cloth. "I opened up an old wound today. It'll stop bleeding eventually."

She reddened. "I'm sorry; I didn't mean to stare."

He led her to the kitchen, where he began opening cabinets in hope of finding the teapot and cups. Shrugging apologetically, he said, "My sister helps me in the kitchen so much that I'm utterly useless even at making tea."

"Oh dear. I think I may have scared your sister half to death."

"Is that so? I hope she hasn't done anything foolish."

Hearing his voice, his sister hastened into the room, speaking to him in the tongue of the east. Rosalinn guessed that she was scolding him for trying to do something with his injured hand. Halfway through her tirade, she stopped and stared at Rosalinn.

"Little Sister, this is Rosalinn."

Rosalinn gaped. How did he already know her name?

"Rosalinn, this is my little sister, Xi-ling."

"What is your name?" Rosalinn asked him.

He seemed puzzled. "You don't remember. Ah well. Of course you don't. I'm Yue Zhao-xi."

It was Rosalinn's turn to be puzzled. "What is there to remember?"

"Now that truly is a long story."

• • •

Zhao-xi was born to a scholar-official in the Emperor's court who held that the highest achievement for a man was to fulfill the scholarly ideal. Unfortunately, Zhao-xi had a penchant for not studying what would help him pass the Imperial Examinations. He would leave the classic writings with his tutor and wander in the woods looking for magic, hoping to chance upon an unwary fairy or a tricky fox-spirit. The animals knew him as well as their own young, and Zhao-xi spent more time with the trees than with his tutors. He paid enough attention to keep his teachers from reporting his slow progress to his father—except when he learned calligraphy. The sense of satisfaction from guiding the brush and ink over the paper was unrivaled, and Zhao-xi found himself weaving grand

One afternoon, Zhao-xi returned from the woods early, so as to begin working on a painting he meant to show to his father, who had recently been asking many questions about his education that Zhao-xi found he could not answer. *Today, the boy thought, Father will no longer frown at me over dinner; he'll be happy for once.* When he arrived at the back gate, he found Xi-ling and their mother sitting under a willow tree, the latter trying to teach the fidgeting girl embroidery. Xi-ling grinned at her brother over her tangle of needle and



thread and said, "Father's waiting for you in his study, Elder Brother." Sparing a moment to scowl at his sister, Zhao-xi rushed into the house, bare feet leaving spots of dirt. On his way to his father's office he attempted to pull out the bits of leaves and bark that had stuck themselves in his hair. It wasn't very effective. His father looked him up and down and sighed.

"You called me, Father."

"A scholar is well versed in the classics. He enjoys a quiet, virtuous life and pursues intellectual, educated activities. He does *not* track dirt into the house."

"Sorry." Zhao-xi mumbled, minutely repentant.

His father frowned down at him. "You have neglected your studies and hidden much from me. What do you have to say to that?"

Zhao-xi lifted his chin, feeling a surge of defiance within. "I know where the animals hide when a human walks through the forest and the song of the trees in the wind." His eyes shone with excitement. "A fox-spirit taught me how to change shape, and I've talked with the birds who live in our garden. Father, I know how to fly! I could show you!"

"Insolent boy! I did not ask you to tell me a children's story." His father regarded him sternly. "You will be twelve in a month, and you're hardly prepared for a career among the Emperor's scholars. I've let you run about for far too long. From today onwards, I will teach you myself. There will be no more fairy stories or wandering about."

No more trysts with the fairies, no more adventures by the shore. Zhao-xi could hardly bear the thought. He dashed out of his father's office.

"Where on earth do you think you're going?" cried the elder Yue.

Zhao-xi didn't slow down to answer. He raced through the garden, flung open the door leading to the outside, and sped into the woods. A nearby tree offered him shelter and hid him from his father, who stood at the garden door calling for him. After a while the esteemed scholar shook his head at his son and turned away, closing the door behind him.

When the sun had set and dusk wrapped the world in its velvet wings, Zhao-xi emerged from his hiding place. A silver shimmer in the air froze him in place. He held his breath. Some great magic was about to happen. A fairy appeared before him, nearly the image of the Goddess of Mercy herself. Her midnight hair cascaded about her shoulders; her warm brown eyes glowed with ancient wisdom. While her skin was as perfect as the porcelain idols in the Yue family shrine, it was her benevolent, gracious smile that sparked Zhao-xi's awe.

Kneeling, he addressed her first, as was polite. "My lady."

She touched his forehead in a time-honored gesture of blessing. "Rise, my child. A scholar's son, destined for greatness, hides like a criminal in the forest. What do you flee?"

Zhao-xi gulped. "My father wants to keep me from coming to the woods and stop me from telling stories."



"You ran from your father because he wanted you to study?" Now the fairy sounded faintly amused.

He protested, "It's not that simple! He would have taken all my friends away and taken away everything I care about. I'd have to spend all my time listening to him lecture me."

The lady blinked at him.

"My lady," he added belatedly, realized the disrespect of his outburst.

"What will you do now? You've lost your home and perhaps the one in the whole world who cherishes you the most."

Zhao-xi would have scoffed had he not been overawed by her. Cherished? His father only wanted the name of Yue to be forever known as a family of scholars and court officials. "What would you advise me to do, my lady?"

She smiled again and produced a dark cloak from the folds of her robes. "Step forward," she commanded. Zhao-xi obeyed—who would dare not to?—and she draped the cloak around his shoulders. With a calligraphy brush and ink, she painted words on his face. Zhao-xi tried not to flinch at the cold touch of the brush on his face. He dared not ask what she was doing, for to do so might sound like doubt.

When she finally stepped away, the world seemed somehow bigger. Colors that Zhao-xi had never before imagined filled the dusky sky. He felt a little dizzy and put forth a hand to steady himself on the bark. Strangely, the tree was farther away than he remembered it, and his hand felt... odd. He tried to ask her what had happened, but could only croak hoarsely.

"Have no fear, my fledgling. When you have learned enough of woodlands, and magic, and flying you shall become human again. When you have learned what love is, you will return home." She blessed him once more and sent the world to spinning and twirling.

When it was still, the new raven found himself in a land where the heather glows purple in the summer gloaming.

• • •

"That was how I became a raven in your country," explained Zhao-xi. "I watched your family care for you and you for them. Your brothers always took you with them when they could, which surprised me. I had never taken my sister with me in my woodland adventures—I didn't even speak to her very much. I saw how your father and mother cared for you even when you tried to reject their help, and I saw how you in turn loved them. It was beautiful." He stared at his now-cold cup of tea.

"Then why did you leave that winter?" Rosalinn asked.

"That year, I had to return home. I had heard the other birds sing of the calling that comes in the fall when it is time to fly south, but I heard no such calling until that winter. For me, it was the call to the east. When I flew away



from your family, I lost myself in a fog. After it cleared, I saw the familiar rooftops of my own hometown. I alighted on a tree in my father's garden, and when my claws touched the branches, I felt all sorts of colors disappearing. Everything seemed to shrink. I barely realized that I had been turned human again when I slipped out of the tree and fell hard on the ground. Hearing the noise, my mother hastened out to the garden. When she saw me sprawled under the tree, she helped me up and found some of my father's clothes for me to wear. At first confused, I remembered that I had spent seven winters with your family. My human form had grown. Part of the spell has not yet faded—I still have a raven's gift of flight." Seeing that Rosalinn was somewhat overwhelmed, he gave her a moment to absorb it all.

Had it really been seven years? Rosalind thought. It seemed as if the raven had always been there. With a twinge of guilt, she remembered the feather that had fallen. "I'm sorry about your hand. I didn't mean to hurt you that badly."

"I understand. Strange how a mere stick could inflict such damage." He examined the wound, frowning.

Suddenly, a silver shimmer appeared in the air. "Godmother!" cried Rosalinn, just as Zhao-xi fell to his knees. The fairy materialized before them.

"Rise my son. There is much to be done while you have sat here telling stories."

He stood up, eyes lowered respectfully. "What is there to be done, my lady?"

Lapsing into the speech of a godmother, she began to list their various troubles. "Well first, there's a crowd outside your garden gate that will likely break through the doors any moment—your 'sorting out' was a rather temporary solution. Then there's the matter of the emperor's soldiers. They realized you're the son of that scholar who wrote all those protests against the divine rule of the great emperor. And then there's the question of Rosalinn's parents, who, thanks to me, aren't worried half to death, but would likely prefer to see their daughter returned soon."

Rosalinn looked at Yue. "You didn't tell me that your father was some sort of rebel."

"It wasn't relevant at the time. He and my mother now hide from the emperor's guards in the woods," explained Yue briefly. "My lady, could you not dispel the crowd with your magic arts?"

"If I was willing to solve all problems with spells and charms, you wouldn't have turned into a raven in the first place. Now go and do what must be done." With that, the fairy dissolved into another shower of silver.

By now they could hear banging on the front gates of the garden. "Bother! Why doesn't she stay when we need her?" grumbled Rosalinn.

From the library where he was stuffing books into a large satchel, Yue called to his sister. "Little Sister, we're going on a journey. Take your



needle and thread with you.” Rosalinn hastily crammed bread and honey from the kitchen into a sack and turned on Yue, irritated.

“What are ye doing? We have nae time for books!”

“If the rioters outside don’t completely loot the house in pursuit of a certain redheaded foreigner, the emperor’s men will likely burn it to the ground. My father would be in agony to see his life’s work in flames.”

“All of us’ll be in flames if ye dinna make haste.”

Finally, Yue was finished with the books. With their burdens of food and books, Zhao-xi and Rosalinn met Xi-ling at the back gate. The little sister had thought to bring a purse full of silver and copper coins. “For the journey,” she explained.

The three raced into the woods just as a multitude of the butcher’s crowd came pouring into the garden, so perfect and silent hours before. The Yue family and Rosalinn rested under from the trees for a moment, catching their breath.

Xi-ling piped up. “Where are we going from here, Elder Brother? I thought you had a plan.”

Zhao-xi walked deeper into the forest, stopped and raised his arms to the sky. As he cawed hoarsely and loudly, ravens began to come from throughout the forest. With a great rustle of wings and a rush of wind, three of the great ravens settled among them. Standing as tall as Rosalinn herself, they looked the humans in the eye. Rosalinn had no doubt that their powerful beaks could kill a man with one strike. Zhao-xi turned back to face his family. “I’ve asked them to carry you part of the way.”

Although Xi-ling and her parents were frightened, they mounted the ravens and took to the skies along with Rosalinn and Zhao-xi. Any protests about leaving in such haste were cut off as they saw the smoke of a burning house billow up in the distance. They were soon engulfed in fog and emerged, shivering and slightly damp, into a clear sky over the raven’s glen. Rosalinn yearned to shout for joy at the familiar landmark, but exhaustion covered her like a fuzzy blanket. She barely managed to keep herself from dropping like a stone onto the ground. When they had all safely landed before Collin and Mara’s home, Rosalinn staggered to the door and attempted to knock, collapsing against it instead.

Collin and Mara were having supper when they heard a thump on the door. Collin rose to investigate. When he opened the door, Rosalinn’s half-sleeping form slumped into the cottage. “Mara, come quickly! It’s our Rosalinn!” cried Collin, scooping his daughter into his arms. Mara hastened to the door and was about to close it until she saw the forlorn four and their three ravens on the lawn. While Collin tucked their daughter into bed, Mara let Zhao-xi’s family come in. Knowing the importance of attracting the good graces of magical creatures, she thanked the three great ravens and welcomed them. When the great ravens seemed satisfied, she took care of Zhao-xi’s family who



were exhausted from the barely planned exodus. With the wonderful magic of a mother, she found for them places to sleep and asked no questions.

The next morning, at breakfast, Collin said to his daughter, "You've many questions to answer, Rosalinn."

"I know, Da. And I'm sorry for leaving that winter without telling you. But you see, if I hadn't, I would never have found Zhao-xi." Rosalinn launched into the story of how she flew to the land of the east and what she had found. While she told the story, Zhao-xi wandered around the little home, half-dazed with wonder.

"Are you looking for something, lad?" asked Collin.

Zhao-xi smiled. "I'm not looking. I'm remembering. Your house is like a second home to me." He told them of his love for the woods and his encounter with Rosalinn's fairy godmother, of how he had been transformed into a raven and had returned to human form.

Collin shook his head. "It seems as though she planned it out beforehand."

"Either way, it all worked out remarkably well in the end," pointed out Mara. "Besides, you know fairies. They never do what seems to be the reasonable thing."

"Who would have known indeed that my father's escape from the emperor would come about because I wandered in the woods when I should have been studying?" laughed Zhao-xi.

Rosalinn smiled. "Who would have known that I'd travel halfway across the world to make a friend?"

Who would have known indeed?

...

With nowhere else to go, Zhao-xi's family stayed with Collin and Mara, and the little house was much too small. They built another house just within earshot of a shout from Collin and Mara's home, and several years later, the two houses became too small again. Rosalinn and her raven had their cottage in the raven's glen, close enough to the other two cottages and close enough to the woods and the fairies.

At the christening of their first child, whom they called Alister, the fairy godmother appeared again. When it was her turn to give a gift, she said to them, "It has been years since I had a bairn of my own. Ask for your child, and I shall give unto you."

Rosalinn and Zhao-xi smiled. "We appreciate the thought," Zhao-xi said. "but I think the gift of nothing would be a very good gift indeed."



# Soaker

JANE SHLENSKY

The winds blew in a heavy rain  
That thumped the ground like fists on clay  
Thick storm clouds rushing past again  
To get to somewhere else that may

Have need of purple-clouded skies  
Hard down-pours and swift-moving streams  
Homes dry as dust who realize  
How water figures in their dreams

A drought may last for months and we  
Ask daily for a kindred shower  
And pray whatever gods there be  
Assuage our thirst, if but an hour

Droplets of rain depend upon  
Dry earth to hold them for a while  
Damp seeds to sprout under the sun  
Drenched, quenched, the earth can bloom and smile



Art by ELIAS SOTO



# **Peace, Life, and Freedom**

**BERNARD LILES**

## ***Peace***

Peace is a state in which there is no hostility among people. There can be peace it is not an unachievable goal. The humanity can accomplish that goal if they would have to reach understanding that they are moving toward destruction of self and the world. With knowledge comes power and with that power we can free ourselves of this circle of violence and smooth the anger and create a world rule not by hatred, but by love. Where there is no strong or weak but rather everyone is equal. The people give a helping hand to his brother and lift up his sister. That way we can come together like the family we are. We can become a family not by looking that the hills or staring skyward but by looking into yourself where that long road of change can take place after that turn to the outer world with the wisdom you have attain from your transformation and use it to change the world that we live in. Only then can we achieve world peace and hold hands and see each other as brothers and sisters that we really are. Go be a instrument of peace not a weapon of war. Go out and make the world a better place.

## ***Life***

Live. Live on in a world where people are created equally. Live on in a world where dreams come true. Live. Live for the day and not worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow has its own problem as does today for living in the moment is what today is what all about. In a moment life can change forever so make the best of every one of them. The most important thing to do is to live life like there is no tomorrow. Who knows what will happen now or later and why worry about that? Life is short and good that the same time how good is depends on you. If you do a random of kindness to someone that person may do it too. The next person may act out of generosity and help someone. The benevolence of such acts will create a world and life full of happiness and that is a world to live in. So I say live on and live in a way that will cause people to give not out of greed but out of charity. That will make life worth living and more valuable in many ways. Now choose this day what way you will live your life. Will it be a life of consideration and goodwill toward men or a life of cruelty and unpleasantry to people?



## Freedom

What is freedom? Freedom is a right to enjoy the pleasures of life in all its glory. The right is given to us at the time of birth and that right should be shared with others. It is a privilege and an honor to come into this world and what a world it is. We shall feel proud to see a beautiful place like this.

Freedom should be not limited to this place we call home, but expanded to those beyond. Where does freedom come from? It comes from the creator of life and the source of life is what set us apart from the rest of the world. With the right to make choices comes responsibility along with punishments. That is why we have laws in place to protect these we can't protect ourselves. Laws don't give freedom, they limited it. They would not be need if we would be considerate to the rights of other. We should cherish the right and be honored that the creator chose us to bestow such a wondrous gift on us. Why the creator has chosen us unimportant what we do with the gift is. So chose to use your gift for the betterment of your brothers and sisters with the freedom you have. And enjoy the world we live on while life is short, but freedom and joy last forever.



Art by BERNARD LILES



# The Diceman Cometh: A Beginner's Guide to the Art of Aleatoric Art

SIR FRANCIS DASHWOOD

Partly concealed amidst the squalid topography of uncompleted homework assignments and discarded Economics notes, two books lie on my desk, the first of which is an anthology of modern poetry for the *avant-garde* mind, entitled *Modern Poetry for the Avant-Garde Mind*, and the second, which is propping up my green-shaded banker's lamp, is *The Rules of Versification and the Technicalities of Poetical Construction* by Jerry Chambers Poe. This latter, neglected, tome is reduced to functioning as a support for a banker's lamp, for it is wholly irrelevant to one engaged in the composition of modern poetry because, as all aficionados of *art moderne* will affirm, this particular artistic medium eschews rules and technicalities and is untrammelled by rhyme, meter or any of the other tedious trappings of traditional verse-making. Indeed, despite its superficial appearance as a prose composition, the article you are reading at this moment may well be a poem.

Aleatoric expression in all of its manifestations is a specialized art form, with its roots grounded in the rich manure of the Dadaism of the twentieth century. This term is derived from the Latin "alea," the rolling of dice, and "aleator," a gambler. From this, it might be inferred that chance plays a critical role in the creation of this style of art. The best illustrations of aleatoric endeavors can be drawn from painting and music.

The aleatoric painter finds a canvas or, better, some far less conventional surface, and assaults the front, back, sides, top, bottom and whatever else is accessible with whatever materials are available and strike his passing fancy. Tomatoes, jam, coffee and bodily excretions have all been press-ganged into the service of Art. It is rare, indeed, for the truly modern artist to use paint—such stale orthodoxy and mental laziness must be spurned ruthlessly. The act of composition is conducted with serendipitous abandon and ideally is concluded by the artist jogging in Birkenstocks and performing contortions in a Hazmat suit on the surface of the new creation.

The final touch is to bestow a title on the work: this may be felt to be a little *infra dig*, but is prudent, since it serves to distinguish the creation from the dirty laundry or sauce-stained table-cloths which customarily inhabit the garrets or our artistic brethren. (To be sure, some die-hard self-expressionists will object at this point, maintaining that the laundry and table-cloth themselves represent a true art form.) The title chosen for the new item will generally be something safely ambiguous, like *Laundry*, or *Table-cloth* or, worse still, *Canvas*, but the more reflective artist, sufficiently secure in the knowledge of his creative talents, may choose to dignify his piece with a more flamboyant nomenclature, such as *Virginal Sensitivity Part 4* or *Thesis on the Theme of Indoor Toilets on the Hermeneutic Amygdala*.



In aleatoric music, similar capricious methods prevail, except that the randomness is made manifest in the selection (or non-selection) of sounds. Tiresomely, most musicians persist in choosing the pianoforte. Early essays into this fertile area involved the composer selecting persons who were unable to play the piano, blindfolding them, and capturing the results of their keyboard doodlings on his tape recorder. Such naive romanticism has more recently been supplanted by a far more idiosyncratic and naturalistic style of playing. Nowadays, the composer himself attacks the piano with either a sledgehammer or, for true aficionados of the genre, with the tape recorder. Other instruments can be incorporated with some success—the combination of the krummhorn and harp beaten irregularly against each other produces stimulating effects on the ear of this listener. Doubtless, different configurations will appeal to other, equally devout, lovers of the new music.

The cutting edge of the new musical technology—in particular the synthesizer—promises much, while the very term “sampling” speaks volumes. Additionally, a group of aleatoric musicians in Paris has raised the question of what qualifies as a musical instrument and the corollary, of what doesn’t. With such full-flowing creative zest, this writer confidently anticipates the symphonies for piano, tabby cat and telescope ensembles that can not long be delayed.

But, in my enthusiasm, I have digressed from my main theme—Aleatoric Poetry. To give the uninitiated an inkling of what is meant by the term, I have selected at random (in truly aleatoric fashion!) a poem entitled *Liaison* that was composed aleatorically. It runs like this:

A corrupt morality infiltrates the ribald reality,  
As an existential response briefly satisfies our character.  
Is the essential sensuality of plain beauty rejected?  
If so, all authentic idols are hypnotized.

The initial impression of disjointedness and obscurity—gobbledygook, even—flows from the advanced subtleties engendered by the random nature of the poem. But dive below the superficial aspects to appreciate the hidden depths of meaning that resonate within the stanza and you will soon discover the liberating power of the die that brings the poet’s vigor and energy to life.

Having now piqued your curiosity, I am certain that you must be asking how this system operates. The basic requirement is the “word-block”. At its simplest, the word-block is divided into four columns, (minimalists advocate two), comprised of, from left to right, adjectives, nouns, verbs, and nouns again. How does one choose the words, you may inquire. This is a personal choice. Virtually any publication can be commandeered—even Durham Tech’s Course Catalog affords an admirable hunting-ground for obscure nouns—but, for myself, I prefer a range of publications including *The Wind in the Willows*,



*Ulysses*, *The Wealth of Nations* and, for a dash of respectability and drabness, *The Wall Street Journal*. A simple word-block might be:

Joyous	Asceticism	Reflect	Reverie
Lustful	Incredulity	Control	Minutes
Indolent	Credo	Analyze	Power
Patient	Nuggets	Embrace	Sensuality
Throbbing	Desire	Adjudicate	Heaven

From this starting point, with the judicious interpolation of definite and indefinite articles, pronouns, and a sprinkling of possessive adjectives in appropriate spaces, one obtains the following poem, which might be entitled *Dingo*:

A joyous asceticism reflects our reverie  
While lustful incredulity controls the seconds.  
The indolent credo analyzes your power  
As patient nuggets embrace sensuality  
And throbbing desire adjudicates in Heaven.

The poem's title was chosen by opening a book and then sticking a pin in the page. This poem was fortunate—some unhappy poems must spend the remainder of their existence struggling with titles such as (*ibid.* pp. 68-9) and *Glossary*.

*Dingo* is, of course, the basic poem formed from our word-block. However, remembering that “alea” refers to the rolling of dice, a die can be used to assist the exponent in the random combination of words. By this technique, and still using the original word-block, I obtained the following poem, simply titled *Ingram*:

A lustful credo reflects the seconds  
As indolent desire embraces sensuality.  
Patient incredulity will adjudicate  
When throbbing asceticism has controlled reverie  
And...

I would have continued my composition beyond this point but, in my poetic exertions, my Muse threw the die too violently and it careened off the back of my desk where it still rests.

How much greater creative pleasure can be found in *Ingram* than in its rather dull antecedent! The chance pairing of “lustful credo” and “indolent desire” is reminiscent of Eliot. More advanced connoisseurs of the aleatoric medium will appreciate the subtle sexual allusions of line 2, which account for the title of this poem.



The principle should now be clear: the poet, rather than strolling down his own age-worn mental pathways, is confronted with a random battery of words and, so, has his imagination exercised and his ability challenged to the utmost.

The word permutations in even such a simple word-block as the one we have been examining are plentiful ( $5^4 = 625$ ), which furnishes a potentially vast poetic output, in sharp contrast with the slight amount of labor needed to assemble the initial block. Once this basic form has been mastered, the serious aleatoreatician will yearn to graduate to still more grand projects, and word-blocks consisting of many columns, and incorporating adverbs, conjunctions, and even punctuation marks will ensue. The innumerable possibilities are clearly limited only by the imagination of the poet.

But no article on Aleatoric Poetry would be complete without referring to the immortal Alfred Elbough, our greatest aleatoric poet. I am indebted to A. N. Lickerness, whose scholarly *The Collected Poems of Alfred Lord Elbough* is indispensable. Elbough's greatest piece, *In Memoriam—Albert Speckamp*, was inspired by the untimely and messy death of his friend under the wheels of a roadroller on the construction site of Spaghetti Junction in Birmingham: it is written in Elbough's "primitive" style (before his conversion to Manichaeism and resultant self-imposed exile in Baffinland). By dint of diligent research using computer simulations, Lickerness has reconstructed Elbough's original word-block: it is a model of simplicity.

Song	Sung
Grass	Mown
Water	Drunk

With inspired dicework and with the addition of a fourth line of breathtaking profundity, Elbough fuses these elements together to produce an elegy rivaling the best of Keats in its intense evocation of pastoral tranquility and purity of thought:

*In Memoriam—Albert Speckamp (1972)*

The grass is sung,  
The song is mown,  
The water is drunk,  
And so was Albert Speckamp.

Surely, this is the finest moment in aleatoric poetry thus far—it is the Everest to which we all must aspire.



# Color Me Blind

MICHELLE BLACKWOOD

I am looking at you  
Yet I do not see

My perception is tainted  
As I gaze upon you through rose colored glass

Once in a blue moon  
You meet someone who touches your heart and soul

Perhaps it is poetic justice  
That our day light has turned dark as night

Crystal clear it has become  
Your true colors leave me flying blind, all alone

Like a shadow of doubt  
Your white lies have colored me blind

The silver moon rising tonight  
Casts its shadow upon the dark knight, no longer white

Battle cries clearly sound  
Clear and present danger seems all around

The golden age of yester year has turned  
To fool's gold, a fall from grace

You can smell walking death  
Upon the summer breeze, the winds of change

I see red raging within  
Sanctuary, peace of mind, is what I seek to find

The kiss of death, when two worlds collide  
Shattering the heart of glass

How precious and fragile  
Life can be, let go the sour green

Bittersweet, the calm before the storm  
Whispering winds howl judgment day is near



Tears of endurance streaming  
Down your face, take a leap of faith

Surrounded now by a purple haze  
Stumbling through though the walls are closing in on you

Drift off to sleep now  
Just let it be, taste sweet victory!

## **Practice**

**JANE SHLENKSY**

Young turkey gobblers  
preen beneath the oaks, showing  
off their tail-feathers  
fanned out like a winning hand  
of cards, posturing for hens.

## **The Transformation**

**JENNIFER ROMINE**

After an exhausting day laden with multiple deadlines and little time to resume normal respiratory function, I climbed into my car and prepared to face another day of 5pm gridlock. The hazy sun pressed her palm against the roof of my four-door sedan, igniting trickles of sweat that beaded across my face and brow, a grim reminder that a large portion of my next paycheck would be forwarded to the auto repair shop for that replacement compressor.

With windows fully down, I aligned my vehicle dutifully into the lane that would take me through four blocks of bumper to bumper and the redemption of the highway exit. Sweat had already begun to paste me to my leather seat, as I flipped through radio channels, lit a cigarette and finally, from the boredom of the wait, began to re-adjust my rearview mirror. Directly behind my vehicle sat another sedan that captured my eye and attention almost immediately.

The woman behind the wheel sat with her hair pulled taut in a matronly hair bun and wore a faded pink uniform that I could only assume was a housekeeping uniform. Her face stared back into my rear view mirror, every line visible buried deep into the skin of her cheek. With traffic at a stand-still



and a red light glaring down at our line of vehicles, the woman in the light blue sedan removed three pins from her stern hair bun. Cotton wisps of gold with dark roots fell softly around her shoulders as the woman shook her head, removing the weight of a wearying day from her shoulders. Glancing back at the red light before me, thoughts of her destination played across my mind. Could she be headed to the gym? A local pub? Running home to prepare a family meal and look over weekend school assignments with her children?

With a quick flick, the light was green and I inched my vehicle to the next red light. The woman, still directly on my bumper caught my eye once more through the rearview mirror. A tube of soft coral lipstick danced across pencil thin lips to reveal a sunny, soft smile. Several lines from the corners of her mouth had vanished. Perhaps she was en route to a lover's arms? A romantic interlude followed by a playful late dinner on this Friday evening? Another green light and another forced red stop before the exit ramp and behind me, still sitting on my bumper, the woman. Only at this moment, within the three small city blocks, she had shed several years from her appearance and emerged a younger, vibrant woman still dressed in a bright pink and sharply pressed housekeeping uniform. With a final tease of her hair with her perfectly manicured finger tips, the thick blonde curls bobbed playfully atop her shoulders and cuddled her warm face.

A final green light and I made my turn onto the exit ramp to sweet redemption only to see the tail lights of the light blue sedan carry away the butterfly that only three stop lights ago had been a caterpillar. As I raced towards my own life, I couldn't help but feel renewed and refreshed by the gift the woman had given me, a small glimpse at the remarkable process of metamorphosis.



Art by SARA M. LAUDEMAN



# Laughter

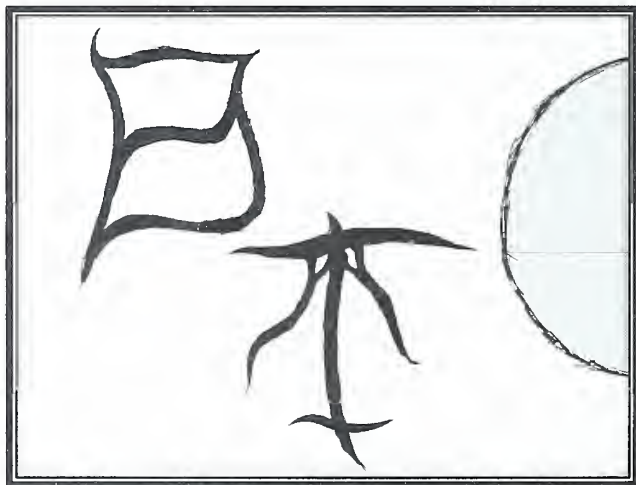
ALEXANDRA RAE COX

I see your laughter in the room.  
It bounces off the walls  
And sneaks out the windows.  
It skitters across the floor  
And dances around us all.

I see your laughter swirling above our heads.  
It bubbles and flips and summersaults through the air.  
It pushes against the walls and escapes under the door.  
Like air in a balloon ready to burst,  
Your laughter fills the room.

I see your laughter shimmering in the light,  
Sending bright dots of red and gold to spin slowly on the walls.  
It fills every corner, illuminates every crack,  
It makes even the imperfections shine.  
Nothing in the room can hide from such bright laughter.

It's a laugh that can't be laughed alone.  
With nowhere left to go, it infects us all.  
For who can frown?  
Who can cry?  
Who can glare  
With your laughter bouncing off the walls?



Art by BENJAMIN PEPE



# True Contact

SARAH JOELLE HOLSTEIN

Jake O'Meara was no hero. Those kinds of reputations don't get handed out lightly—they get handed to people along with big awards on a big stage with fancy lighting and an orchestra housed in another building down the block. It might be a while before he made it that far—baby steps, baby steps.

Baby steps had taken him as far as an uncomfortably chilly and cramped room where he sat slumped back in a chair that had seen better days. So had he, for that matter—whereas once someone might have described him as 'fair skinned', his complexion fell solidly under 'pallid' at this point. Perhaps it was a blessing he was nowhere near that awards ceremony yet. He was no hero—he certainly didn't look the part.

But Jake was in the business of making people into heroes. He was a cinematographer, and a writer, and a producer all in one tired, overloaded package more colloquially referred to as an Independent Film-Maker. With a few short documentaries under his belt and his name in the credits of a handful of popular vid series, it was high time he took his aspirations to another level and tried something new.

'New', at least today, wasn't exactly that at all. The small room with its uncomfortable chair was deep within the labyrinthian halls of the New-London Archives, which itself was buried beneath the sky-scraping structures of the southern boroughs. The Archives, fully deserving of the capitalized titling, had become the go-to resource for research technical, biographical, or categorical in the latter half of the twenty-first century—Jake could only conclude that this was because of the general trend of historical novelty that had preserved the greater European continent from dissolving into obsolescence entirely.

Everyone had to be good at something, even if that something was 'being old'.

The real value of the Archives, though, came not from the impressive technology it boasted for its patrons' use, nor even the boundless depths of trivial data available for consumption—it was the shortcuts it provided for people seeking records still held tightly in the grubby mitts of foreign governments. These documents, though not technically labeled as classified, still often found themselves mired in the bogs of modern bureaucracy and unavailable to average citizens who might actually be curious enough to access them. Associates of the Archives, for a substantial membership fee, tended to find these documents delivered to their own grubby mitts that much faster and with far less exasperation.

It had cost Jake three summers and a full year working aboard a small fishing vessel out of Whitby to be able to afford his membership—and he still couldn't seem to get the rank smell of fish out of his clothes.

Still, it was worth it. It had to be.



Three hours later, the charm of the experience wore thin. Whatever money had been invested in technology and asset allocation hadn't been matched in generating documentation on how to use any of it. He'd had a headache for at least a third of the time he'd been trawling the depths of the database, and even the relief at finally finding what he was searching for didn't really lessen the throbbing just behind his eyes.

"Accessing data," the synthesized system voice announced with the same subdued enthusiasm it had used when it informed Jake that it *couldn't locate requested records*, or when it told him to *attempt the search again with new parameters*, or how it would very much like him to *stop yelling, please*. Grudgingly, as the records summary inscribed itself upon the projected display, he had to admit that the trouble had probably been worth it.

*Primary First-Hand Account of True Contact via Aquarius Station  
UCL 117, CE 2146*

The real deal.

Jake sat back in the chair, pulled up the first file, and started to read.

*In accordance with proper procedure as described in SUM documentation, consider this a declaration that the following personal account of the events that transpired on UCL 117.8.05 until 8.09 is, to the best of my knowledge, true and accurate. I record this with a full understanding that many of the facts presented may be unverifiable—I can myself only hope to fill in the gaps in my own memory with logical deductions and not conjecture—and I sincerely apologize to whatever poor bastard has to sort through this mess even after the fact.*

*My name is Dr. Sunidhi Srivastava. I hold the equivalent rank of Lieutenant 2nd Class and, as of four days ago, that's been rank enough to hold command over the bedraggled lot we've been reduced to. We, the survivors, were stationed at Aquarius Base, in orbit around Jupiter. As I am sure you are well aware, we were attacked on UCL 8.05. At the current moment, I am not aware of whether the station still remains in orbit, or whether it's simply a new ring of debris to add to Jupiter's growing collection.*

*I suppose it doesn't really matter either way, because I suspect I'll not have the chance to return there—good riddance, really.*

*The attack on Aquarius originated, from what we have surmised, from the orbit of Callisto—possibly even from the moon itself, though considering what we've seen, I would not discount the possibility of a lagrange point initiation. It pains me to admit such a*



*thing, but at this point it can't be denied that we know far less about our captors than they seem to know about us. It could not have been without great study of our station—our people, our capabilities, even our culture to some degree—that their attack succeeded, and we were so unprepared to defend ourselves against a foe such as this.*

So far, none of this seemed particularly novel. True Contact hadn't exactly been a quiet affair—everyone and their cousin knew about what happened on the station from the data logs and other recordings that had been released some time after. This was one of the few personal accounts that existed, even bound up in bureaucratic red-tape that kept it restricted to government access and the Archives.

It was also the only reason Jake had come here in the first place.

"Come on, doc—give me something to work with," he urged under his breath.

*Everything we thought we knew about the Rakh is wrong—exceptionally, woefully, and tragically wrong. What mysteries of science we pursued were trivialities—footprints and dung we studied while the tiger itself stalked us from the brush. Even now, five days into our captivity, I am faced with a burden of knowledge I wish not to pass on to those few of us still clinging to optimistic, perhaps even naive hope of redemption.*

*I don't think we're getting out of this alive.*

*And as harrowing a thought as that may be, it has, at the same time, given me opportunity to understand something of the nature of this oft-hated and despised regimented lifestyle, here on the frontier lands of Sol: At the edges of our human society, chaos slips into every gap we allow—and even those we do not. None could have predicted the Rakh's actions specifically, but the assumption that entropy might eat at the foundations of our society by chip or by chunk was spot-on. And so, by the wisdom of centuries of imperialist expansion from Earth into space, so came to us the SUM protocols—regimented order to hold together a society of people on the frontiers of the human universe—and within the SUM is our directive 84.II.C: "The commanding officer shall make every attempt to safely record, document, and transmit observations and intelligence data."*

*It has taken me four days to find the idea of taking command even remotely palatable, let alone willingly abide by the protocol as established by our commanders-in-absentia. Even now, I balk at the idea of reliving those events objectively. I really, really don't wish to do any of this.*

*But I will.*



*Some members of our group have been scouring the contents of the SUM in the vain hopes that it might provide insight that, to we who are not soldiers (nor, for that matter, terribly accustomed to living without comfortable chairs to sit in), might deliver us from this situation. If you are curious, know that it does not—but it does, from what I can see, at least allow us the wool to spin and tug low over our own eyes. Follow the rules, follow orders, patiently wait, and don't lose hope.*

*But, I digress—and I suggest you get used to that, because frankly I'm only doing this because I have to, not because I want to. To return to the events of 8.05, then:*

Jake stopped there for a moment, rubbing his temples slowly. SUM—that was an acronym he recognized from the hours of fruitless digging he'd done just prior—or, maybe not fruitless after all. It was something, he had discovered, that the US Navy included as a standard shipboard resource for its vessels, like an 'open in case of emergency' guide for anyone unfortunate enough to get stuck in a situation where they couldn't remember what regulations they were supposed to follow—Since, obviously, if you were going to provide a lifeline for people effectively lost at sea, a book of rules and regulations was definitely the way to go.

He would have opted for a machete, but that's just the kind of guy he was.

Even Jake had to admit, though, that while perhaps not immediately useful in the kind of situation Dr. Srivastava was in, without it, these records probably wouldn't even exist. It was something to be grateful for, after the fact.

For those left to feel grateful, anyway.

*The attack began at 04:34, though I suspect the engagement may have begun before that time. Central Security triggered the alerts at that time of the attack, and warned to stay in our quarters until the alarms stopped. They didn't, of course.*

*Communication with CenSec stopped at approximately 09:03. Perhaps ten minutes after—no more than that, for certain—I engaged with the enemy Rakh for the first time. They are nothing like what we'd found on Callisto, and nothing like what we'd seen in our labs. The black clouds of particles—why I named them Rakh, as they looked like so many floating ashes—those are just all we could see, on our own.*

*In truth, those silicate 'ashes' are nothing but a direct gravitational result of their presence here, in our dimension—well, 'dimension' may not be the correct term, but if you would imagine, they are from somewhere, sometime, some... place, distant from us, yet at the same time, present. I'm not a physicist, I couldn't tell you the details, and this is only as I understand it from what they have*



*attempted to explain to me, who must be in their eyes (or their equivalent) some lowly slug of a being—an assessment I rather resent, coming from a cloud of particles looking like nothing more than a volcanic fart.*

*Regardless of their collective opinions, the point is that their whole being is not entirely accessible to us, so long as they wish. This, obviously, makes the idea of fighting against them somewhat harrowing, as physical force does not seem as if it might be effective in the least. I've theories that weapons can, and probably must be developed to be used against them, but unless anyone else figures this out or receives this information from a future transmission, I can only foresee devastating losses on our part.*

*I will go into more descriptive detail of their physiology as I understand it later—for now, I mention it because of its relevance to how we were captured and transported. As we had no idea that the Rakh had any more form than their buzzing ashen clouds, nobody was prepared to be restrained by them, or physically harmed, for that matter. As all of us had been asleep when the attack began and in our quarters, those of us who survived were apprehended individually and then carried, in a manner I remain hesitant to attempt to describe in detail, to the mess hall. I was almost more acutely distressed by their decision to bring us there than at the situation itself—after all, when did they find out that this was an informal place of gathering, for those of us who are not soldiers?*

*What can I say, we like to eat and talk, rather than lounging around and playing games or drinking too many beers. Outside of the mess hall, we survive off of teas, coffees, and our work ethics. But in the scant hours we have to ourselves, we do still enjoy sitting—and eating.*

*I noticed that most of us there were scientists and technicians. Judging by the expressions on so many faces, and confirmed later when we had time to speak, it seemed that the soldiers—our noisy pests, our men with guns—had been massacred where they stood. Where they slept, even. They knew who among us would be likely to fight back, and so they were cut down, and the rest of us cowed in silence. It was sickening, brutal efficiency in retrospect, as now I have a better understanding that what weapons we possessed as a whole would never have stopped even one of them. It was as if the very fact that these men and women might resolve to fight at all costs was enough to sentence them to death.*

*We're alive because the Rakh knew that in our hearts, we are simply too afraid, or too reluctant to even hope we could win. That so few of us survived is testament to the bravery of those who*



*fell, and I've never felt so mixed an emotion as that which I do when I realize that pacifism has saved my life by marking me as a coward.*

*SUM protocol recommends passive resistance when apprehended by an enemy force, so as to minimize losses and extend hope for survival and rescue. I'm inclined to agree, and I'm comforted by the idea that whoever wrote this bloody thing has a better understanding of who would be using it than whoever designed and programmed it.*

*I mean that. If I live, I'll see to it that they are dismissed from any position they hold, with extreme prejudice. I've been through enough to justify any level of pettiness.*

*During our forced assembly, I had a chance to better observe our captors. Assuming that each 'cloud' of particles—perhaps swarm is a better descriptor—is an individual Rakh would be a mistake, given what I have seen, but there were perhaps twenty swarms surrounding our group of maybe thirty. They were mostly silent, save for the electric hum they seemed to emit—this sound is well documented in our study of their swarms in our lab. Now and again, though, there would be a sound almost inaudible, like a low rumble that was not any of the sundry ambient systems sounds we'd gotten used to hearing in our time on Aquarius. Aside from the rumble, there was also something like a hiss, or perhaps an exhalation, though I can only assume that is not related to breathing in any sense. I could not say, even now, what kind of communication or was, or if it was even that.*

*It shocked us, then, when one of them (again, an assumption of individuality) spoke to us. It sounded as human as any of us, though there was something about its use of inflection and some awkward pronunciation that indicates its mastery of at least one language is not yet entirely complete. Still, even I must admit that the facsimile was unnervingly convincing, and I recall that it set me on edge to the point my jaw became sore from clenching my teeth. It told us that we would be wise not to resist (something I was already quite aware of, thank you kindly) and that we would be taken away from there shortly. It did not explain how, or why, and even at that time I was certain it was only telling us this information in advance to keep us from absolute panic.*

*Unfortunately, not all of us could keep our fears in check. One man—I believe his name was Zhou, he was an engineer, not one of our team—he began at one point to shake, and then he started weeping. Parvaneh, one of my technicians, she tried to go over to him to calm him down, but he bolted. He ran for the doors, even though there's no way he could have missed the Rakh swarms visibly guarding it.*



*His death was a violent, agonizing thing that I cannot, and will not, describe in detail, no matter what protocol demands. I'm glad, for my own sanity, that I did not know him very well, but even now, I can remember passing smiles as we stood in that same mess hall, waiting our turns for hot water to make tea. He preferred green tea, to my black.*

*Direct physical resistance, I can only re-state with the greatest emphasis, is not recommended.*

*After that, they separated us further, into smaller groups and removed from the mess hall. I, and five others — Parvaneh Nazemi, David Marsh, Mala Jones, Arash Okhovat, and Finn Benavidez— were taken to docking bay C2, lead and followed by two of the Rakh swarms. We walked on our own power, of our own will, all of us pale-faced and doing all we could to hide it from ourselves and each other. Our path took us through passages stained incarnadine, and I did not count the corpses— after a point, it became difficult to discern where one ended and another began.*

*As of this point, I can only confirm that the six of us are still alive.*

That was the end of the first file. An oppressive silence settled in the small room after Jake finished reading it. Even knowing what he did—what everybody did—about True Contact and about Callisto didn't lessen the impact of the doctor's words. Maybe he was too green, too new at storytelling to have developed the objectivity he knew he'd need for these kinds of ventures. Film-making—no, hero-making, it wasn't supposed to be an easy thing. That's not what made heroes. after all.

Is this what did?

The tiny, dark room didn't feel quite as cramped anymore—not when Jake himself felt so small.

• • •

For Dr. Srivastava, in the timeless span of history, weeks had passed since that first night, when the Rakh had awakened in a way nobody had expected. For Jake, it had only been another two hours, though it really hadn't felt like that at all. No longer slumped in the chair, but leaning forward like an expectant spear-fisher, he'd finished reading the remaining written records with an obsessive voracity he hadn't experienced since his earliest bookworming years, scarcely realizing what time had passed him by. The story—the records, documentation, what have you—it was incomplete, and coming to the end of the last file had left him in a state closer to anger than to disappointment.





Art by SARAH JOELLE HOLSTEIN



It was the computer's synthesized voice, in its ever-patient tones, that had brought him back from the verge of panic. *"Would you like to access the remaining media files as audio or as transcriptions?"*

Jake stared at the display without comprehension long enough for the system to assume he hadn't heard (or understood), and it repeated the question. "Yes," he said quickly as he straightened in the chair, "Yes—I mean, as audio! Play it as audio. Uh. Please."

*"Accessing records..."* the system voice replied. Quickly, without preamble, it was replaced by a different voice—one human, soft, and with an accent that Jake found more charming than foreign. This was Dr. Srivastava, then? Somehow, from the way she had written, he imagined her voice would have been harsher—like a teacher, or a particularly sour librarian. Instead, it made him think of girls he'd known—quiet girls in coffee shops with their cups of tea and school books.

With that thought, something ugly twisted in Jake's stomach. Grimacing, he closed his eyes and listened.

*"It's been, what, a week now?"*

*"Yes-- ah, almost exactly a week then—well, it's taken me that long to even, ah, find the time to figure out how to record audio without it pissing itself and restarting. Obviously tech-dev funding goes to our projects more than outsourced rubbish like internal protocol— which I suppose I'm grateful enough for, but really, this whole thing..."*

*"... well, I'll get right down to it, then. We've been separated, all of us, as of yesterday. They took Finn and David away three days ago, and yesterday Mala and Arash. As far as I know—I think—well, they're probably alright— as much as any of us are."*

*"It's my birthday, you know— today, the eighteenth. I'm a Libra, as if anyone wouldn't have guessed. It's funny, because I haven't celebrated in over a decade, and probably the last five years, maybe? I haven't even realized I'd reached thirty until I was filling out paperwork last year. What does one year matter anyway? Or two, or three— it's all downhill after twenty-four."*

By now, Jake was used to her tangents and her avoidances—she could be trusted her to meander back to her point soon enough. And so she did, though more jarringly than Jake expected.

*"... Parvaneh died six days ago. That's why they separated us, I think. There was a fight— just a stupid— it was panic, nobody meant for it to happen, but— it happened, and she's gone, and we'll get used to it— we'll have to live with it. I have to live with it."*



*"Ah.. it was... mm. David, he'd—well, we'd all been on edge, because they'd started talking to us more often, treating us better—more food, more requests honored—but David, he didn't want to become compliant, he said—he didn't want them to think they were winning us over. Parvaneh, she just... she hadn't been taking it well, any of this, and she was the one who struck first—it surprised all of us, we were stunned by it, but David, he just... he just..."*

*"I can't do this..."*

*"I can't."*

Silence, from the recording, and then a muted pop, like a shift in the ambient noise, too sharp and too familiar to Jake—who had lived in the editing room with his headphones on for half of the year—to miss. She'd stopped the recording, and then restarted it. When she spoke again, her voice was more subdued, and possessing a particular weariness within it that left Jake reluctant to guess at what had happened, much in the same way he felt compelled not to ask after girls when their eyes were red and puffy.

The exact same way, really.

*"The SUM protocol dictates that I should acknowledge and document criminal acts committed under my command even during situations of duress—in this case, captivity. Yes, David killed Parvaneh. Yes, it was a direct result of physical assault meant to cause harm. It happened. She's gone, and we're all sorry. We're all sorry, and now we're all alone, because even the Rakh can't trust me to keep us in order anymore."*

*"I don't blame them."*

*"Happy Birthday, Sunidhi. "*

"End of file," the system voice noted abruptly, pulled him away from Dr. Srivastava and back into the stifling room he'd never left. "Accessing next file..."

Jake hit the mute command on the console quickly and with surprising force, silencing the system voice and changing the projected display's illuminated hues from its default viridian-tones to a stand-by amber. He settled back in the chair again, covering his mouth with a hand almost self-consciously.

The realization crept in on him slowly: he was too green for this. Too new, too fresh, too—too something, and not enough of the other things he needed to be to tell her story the way it deserved to be told. Dr. Srivastava deserved more than some upstart camera jockey's clumsy portrayal of the reality she'd lived through—her story deserved the A-List, big-cinema production team and the finesse of a master's touch. That sort of thing... he couldn't offer, yet. He wasn't there yet.

He was no hero, after all.



# **The Keeper of Dreams**

**MICHELLE BLACKWOOD**

Are you the keeper  
Of dreams, wishes and secrets

Are you the maker  
Of men, nations, tribes and worlds

Do you know the secrets  
To our questions, doubts, hopes and fears

Do you understand what drives us  
What keeps things in motion  
Why we cannot stop it from  
Happening over and over again

Do you know  
The meaning of life, the truth  
We all seek to find

Can you help us find our way  
How to walk, how to listen and how to be

Do you hear  
Our words, our thoughts, our intentions

Can you fathom  
What is, what was and what is yet to be

Does this exist at all, outside my mind  
Could this be another place and time

Why do we continue to search, to strive to find  
The meaning left behind

Are you the keeper  
Of dreams, wishes and secrets

Can you keep mine?











*"O! for a muse of fire, that would ascend the  
brightest heaven of invention."*

*William Shakespeare*

*"You fail only if you stop writing."*

*Ray Bradbury*

*"Easy reading is damn hard writing."*

*Nathaniel Hawthorne*

*"True ease in writing comes from art,  
not chance, as those who move easiest have  
learned to dance."*

*Alexander Pope*

